46 British politics

A

This text from an incisive commentator on British politics and society, Anthony Sampson, uses many words and expressions which are useful when talking or writing about politics.

Behind the public debates of parliament, the hidden pressures on government influence **legislation**[1] much more than speeches. Growing numbers of Members of Parliament (MPs) are themselves well-paid to represent commercial or special interests, sometimes more assiduously than their own **constituents**[2]. But the most powerful **lobbies**[3], like the big **corporations**[4] or the **Institute of Directors**[5], do not bother much about Members: they can go straight to **ministers**[6] and **civil servants**[7]. [...] **Lobbyists**[8] reach their annual climax when the **Chancellor of the Exchequer**[9] is preparing his **annual budget**[10] and receives **petitions**[11] from business interests pressing for **tax concessions**[12].



1 law-making (person = a **legislator**; verb = **legislate**)
2 people who elected one MP (as a group = **constituency**)
3 interest groups who try to influence MPs (verb = **lobby**)
4 large companies (adjective = **corporate**)
5 organisation of top business people
6 MPs with top responsibilities, e.g. for health, education
7 people employed in government departments (the Civil Service)
8 people who lobby (see note 3)
9 finance minister (in the UK)
10 yearly financial plan (of tax rates, etc.)
11 formal requests often signed by lots of people
12 reductions in taxes (verb = **concede**)

B

In this text Anthony Sampson looks at the relative strengths of different types of lobbyists.

The interests of **producers**[1] – **centralised**[2], **close-knit**[3] and **well-funded**[4] – inevitably win over the **consumers**[5], who are scattered and **fragmented**[6], and the most powerful pressures of all, like the road-and-car lobby, change the face of the country through backstairs pressures which are concealed from any public debate. Gradually non-commercial lobbies have also become much better organised, like **Friends of the Earth**[7] or the **Child Poverty Action Group**[8], some with hundreds of thousands of **paid-up members**[9]. Others relentlessly lobby Members of Parliament with mass-produced letters and **deputations**[10] to intimidate and encircle them. [...] They have done much to **counter**[11] big-business pressures with the help of effective publicity; but they cannot take account of **grievances**[12] of the individual, who can only **appeal to**[13] his own Member of Parliament.

1 manufacturers; a person or business that makes something (note words from same root – **product, productive, mass-produced,** etc.)
2 concentrated in one central organisation (noun = **centralisation**)
3 with close ties to each other
4 with plenty of financial support
5 people who use/buy products
6 separate; not centralised
7 large environmental organisation
8 large organisation helping children
9 people who have paid their membership fees, i.e. committed members
10 people sent to speak for a group
11 oppose
12 complaints about unfair treatment
13 request support from

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Exercises

46.1 Are these statements about the texts true or false?

1 Parliamentary debates are the main influence on legislation.
2 Some MPs do more for big business than for their constituents.
3 The most powerful business organisations approach ministers directly.
4 Business is influential partly because it is well-organised and has money.
5 The public is well-informed about all the different lobbies.
6 Non-commercial organisations are getting better at influencing MPs.
7 The individual can do nothing if he or she has a grievance.

46.2 Read the texts opposite and find three examples of:

1 nouns denoting people (Text A)
2 adjectives that can be used to describe social organisations (Text B)
3 verbs that can have a strong political association (Text B)

46.3 Find words from the texts formed from the same roots as the words in the box.

1 commerce	3 constituency	5 consumption	7 legislate
2 mass-produced	4 petitioner	6 pressurise	8 representative

46.4 Now match the words in the box in 46.3 to their meanings below.

1 person standing for the interests of a group
2 person signing a formal request
3 made in large quantities
4 to make laws
5 area represented by one MP
6 to try to force someone to do something
7 amount purchased, used or eaten
8 all the activities associated with business

46.5 Explain the meanings of these words from the texts and put them in a typical phrase.

Text A: influence assiduously a climax press for
Text B: close-knit backstairs relentlessly intimidate encircle

46.6 Which word from A or B also has the meaning in italics and fits the gap in the sentence?

EXAMPLE *polite* His behaviour was ..civil.., but not particularly friendly.

1 *place where customers stand to buy things in a shop or drinks in a bar.*
Customers are requested to queue at the other end of the ..... .
2 *the entrance hall of a house/building* Let's meet in the hotel ..... at 8 p.m.
3 *be attractive to someone* That kind of music doesn't ..... to me at all.
4 *vicar* Jo married a ..... and had lots of work to do helping in his parish.
5 *not criminal* Divorce cases are heard in ..... courts.
6 *round piece in a game* Each player takes it in turn to move his or her ..... around the board.

46.7 Answer these questions about politics in your own country.

1 What processes lead to legislation in your country?
2 What is the role of debate in government in your country?
3 How powerful are (a) big-business and (b) non-commercial lobbies in your country?

FOLLOW UP

Find more political vocabulary by visiting these websites: www.number-10.gov.uk for the UK and www.firstgov.gov or www.whitehouse.gov for the US.

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