

# UK Conservatives and Lib Dems open for business

Barry Mason  
4 February 2013

The UK's coalition government is to expand its "strategic relations", or ministerial "buddy" scheme, whereby selected multinational companies are given direct access to a particular minister.

In February 2011 Conservative Trade Minister Lord Green unveiled the scheme, together with Vince Cable, the Liberal Democrat business secretary. It was officially launched in July that year. The scheme consisted of pairing top multi-national companies with particular ministers—as "buddies".

A UK Trade and Investment strategy paper at the time explained: "Ministers will play an active role in developing and sustaining winning relationships with investors, as well as the UK's top exporters...These customers will be able to call on expertise and resources across government to ensure they receive a seamless 'one-stop' service".

In the initial scheme six ministers were slated to act as buddies for major companies. Among the pairings at the time was that of David Willetts, universities and science minister, with pharmaceutical companies such as GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca. Jeremy Hunt, then culture secretary, was paired with information and technology companies, with Cable acting for oil and gas companies. Cable served as chief economist for Shell between 1995 and 1997.

The "buddy" scheme has put the previous ad hoc arrangements on a more formal basis. It totally vindicates Marx's verdict that the executive branch of the modern state functions as an executive committee for managing the affairs of the ruling class.

Initially 38 companies were allocated a "ministerial buddy", but according to a recent *Guardian* article a further 12 companies have been given this personal access, with plans for a further 30 companies to be included over the course of this year.

According to the article, the 38 companies have had nearly 700 face to face meetings with their allotted "buddy". "The full degree of contact between the chosen companies and the government is not known as telephone calls, emails and meetings with officials are not recorded on the registers", the article explains.

Among the 30 additional companies to be granted the high level of ministerial access will be property companies Atkins and Balfour Beatty, to be paired with climate change minister Greg Barker. Barker has responsibility for the coalition government's zero-carbon homes programme.

A Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) article in September 2011 pointed out the scheme raised conflicts of interest issues. The article referred to the Channel 4 Television Dispatches programme aired in 2010 in which Labour Party figures including Geoff Hoon, Stephen Byers and Patricia Hewitt were secretly filmed boasting how they could get privileged access to the corridors of power for companies.

The programme explained how these politicians could use their previous connections when in government to secure lucrative jobs in industry.

The BIJ article commented, "A revolving door clearly exists between politics and business. After all, former Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt landed a lucrative job with Boots, while David Blunkett, the former secretary of state for work and pensions, went on to work for A4e, a leading employment and training firm that bids for multi-million pound contracts in the UK from Blunkett's former department".



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**

