

## Goodbye, Mr Speaker

Posted by Peter on 23 May 2009



The Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin.

Who is Mr Speaker? Mr Speaker is the [chairman](#) of our House of Commons, in Parliament. He is called the Speaker of the House of Commons because, several hundred years ago, it was his job to speak to the King, to tell the King what Parliament wanted, and to bring the King's reply back to Parliament. Generally, the King's reply was "no", so the Speaker did not have an easy job. In the 15th century, several Speakers made the King so angry that he had them arrested and [executed](#). Politics was fun in those days.

Since then, life for the Speaker has been more peaceful. Yes, there was a Speaker at the end of the 17th century who was sacked because he had accepted a [bribe](#) from businessmen in the city of London. But generally, the Speaker's life has few problems. He, or she, chairs [debates](#) in the House of Commons, and makes sure that the House of Commons obeys its rules. The only real disadvantage is having to wear old-fashioned black clothes with gold [embroidery](#), and having to listen to so many boring debates.

But things have changed. To understand what has happened to Mr Speaker, you need to know that Members of Parliament (MPs) in Britain receive a [salary](#), and are also able to get other money, or "allowances", to pay for things like an office, a secretary, travel and the cost of having a second home in London, if they do not live in London already. MPs make a list of their expenses - we say that they make a [claim](#) - in order to get this extra money. They give their claim to the finance office in Parliament. If the finance office is happy with the claim, the MP gets the money he or she has claimed.

Until very recently, information about MPs allowances was a state secret. But now, the newspapers have found information about the allowances, and published it. It is clear that some MPs have behaved dishonestly. One MP claimed money to pay interest on a loan to buy a flat in London - which was fine, except that he had already repaid the loan and there were no interest payments. Other MPs claimed for the cost of repairing houses, which they then sold at a profit. One MP, who lives in a castle, claimed for the cost of cleaning the [moat](#) - that is, the water around the castle. Another MP, who has a country estate, keeps ducks on the lake on his estate. But foxes kept killing the ducks, so he claimed for the cost of building a [little island for his ducks](#) in the middle of the lake, so that the foxes could not catch them.

All this has made people very angry. There are demands for big changes in the way that Parliament is run - for changes in our election system, changes in the way MPs do their jobs and the way they are paid.

## **Goodbye, Mr Speaker**

*Posted by Peter on 23 May 2009*

And Mr Speaker? Well, the present speaker - Michael Martin is his real name - has opposed changes and many MPs think that he is not the right person to lead the House of Commons. So they have forced him to resign. He has become the first speaker for over 300 years to be forced out of office. Next month, Members of Parliament will elect a new Speaker to wear silly clothes and listen to their boring debates.

I will be on holiday next week, so there will be no podcast. I am going to be a captain of a ship, and will sail far away to new and interesting places. I shall tell you about it when I get back.

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=463>.