

How the Left's old boy network helps appoint the top mandarins

WE HAVE already revealed the discreet but powerful matrix that Common Purpose — an unaccountable body — has constructed in British public life.

Its 'graduates' occupy important positions across the UK public sector. They are encouraged to seek advice or help from each other through the organisation's so-called '360 Community' alumni network.

Several figures recently involved in the appointing of top positions in Whitehall, the wider Civil Service, quangos and other regulatory bodies also have had direct or indirect links to the Bell-Middleton network. Julia Middleton is herself a case in point. For a number of years, the Common Purpose founder and CEO played a role in the process of approving major public sector appointments as an adviser to Baroness Fritchie, the Commissioner for Public Appointments, at the Cabinet Office.

'My role,' Middleton has written, 'was to ensure that proper process was followed (basically, that the politicians didn't just employ their best friends).'

The position of Commissioner for Public Appointments is now held by Sir David Normington, who can be seen on YouTube in a 2009 Common Purpose interview with Middleton about



Support: Sir Bob Kerslake

'leadership'. Dame Suzi Leather and Baroness Kennedy appear in the same film.

But Middleton is not alone in having such influence in the public sector. Consider:

■ **SIR DAVID BELL:** Trustee and former chairman of Common Purpose, founder of the Media Standards Trust, backer of Hacked Off and Leveson Inquiry panel member, was a Civil Service Commissioner from 2001 until 2007;

■ **RUTH MACKENZIE:** A former member of Common Purpose's 'Non-Executive Committee', she was until 2010 an 'expert adviser' at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, which was later jointly responsible for choosing the Leveson panel;

■ **DAME JANET PARASKEVA:** A former Common Purpose trustee, she was from 2006 to 2010 the First Civil Service Commissioner, a post which is tasked with overseeing the political impartiality of Civil Service appointments. On the Common Purpose website she is quoted as saying: 'Common Purpose has given so many different people opportunities to learn about how society works, how power is used and abused, and to see just how effective organisations work.'

Both Paraskeva and Bell were on the ten-strong Civil Service's Senior Leadership Committee (SLC). Bell was a non-executive member. This body plays a key role in appointing the 'Top 200' posts in the Civil Service. In other words, the permanent secretaries, heads of department and other key mandarins.

The Cabinet Office confirmed that Dame Janet Paraskeva served on the SLC from March 2006 until the end of 2010, and that Bell joined the SLC in early 2005.

His term did not end until July 2011 — the month that Hacked Off was launched and the Leveson Inquiry announced.

The Cabinet Office also confirmed to the Mail that at an SLC meeting in June 2010, the following — 'Item 7' — was discussed:

'Running workshops for the Top 200 (Civil Servants) under the Common Purpose model was proposed. Committee members agreed to consider the costs.'

Small world. And what a coup

for Common Purpose. The SLC is now chaired by the head of the Civil Service, Sir Bob Kerslake.

Sir Bob was Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council from 1997 to 2008. On the Common Purpose website he gives enthusiastic recommendation of the charity and signals his own involvement in its development.

'I have been involved with Common Purpose over a number of years... From my own experience, I know that the skills and leadership capacity of Sheffield City Council were significantly enhanced by having a number of managers who had participated in Common Purpose programmes.'

This is the new head of the Civil Service, remember.

A spokesman for Sir Bob said this week: 'Sir Bob has no official role with Common Purpose. His attendance at Common Purpose events will have been a matter of public record, as are details of Common Purpose courses.'

FOOTNOTE: RICHARD HOOPER, who was Ofcom deputy chairman under Leveson assessor Lord Currie and a member of Leveson assessor Sir David Bell's Media Standards Trust's Review Panel, was until 2007 an Independent Public Appointments Assessor to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport — the very department which was involved in selecting the six-strong Leveson panel.



Trustee: Dame Janet Paraskeva

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