

ELECTION ROUND-UP

ONE person who should be ready for Theresa May's snap election is Fareham Tory MP Suella Fernandes, who since January has had no fewer than three free sessions from "presentation coaches" Melior Advisors.

According to the latest register of MPs' interests, the Soho-based outfit gave her £5,400 worth of "communication skills" training. Because Melior rejects the usual techniques "such as: forced smiles, clever sales closes, hand gestures (such as the thumb point), and changing the intonation of the voice" as "inauthentic", Fernandes certainly won't sound wooden. Instead, given that Melior clients are heavily involved in banking and private equity and include KKR, Cinven, Nomura and UBS, the wannabe MP is going to sound just like... a banker!

ALTHOUGH Brighton Kempton Tory MP Simon Kirby defends a tiny majority in the general election, he can sleep safe knowing that jaded subs on the local paper are rooting for him.

On 21 April the Brighton *Argus* ran an online profile of the councillors and campaigners vying to be the area's Labour candidate under the headline: "Can one of this rabble unseat MP with one of the country's smallest majorities?"

And lo, the comments section erupted, with readers pouring in to criticise the "pro-Tory" "crap paper" and its "disgraceful biased journalism". It took only a few hours for the *Argus* to cave in and change the headline. Good work, rabble!

FORMER Labour leadership hopeful Angela Eagle, who is running for re-election in Wallasey in June, has received financial help from an old friend of the party.

The MP received a £15,000 donation to her constituency party from veteran Labour lobbyist Alan Donnelly at the end of March. His firm, Sovereign Strategy, represents Maximus, the US firm that profits from carrying out the much-criticised tests on the disabled the Department for Work and Pensions uses to try to cut the benefits bill (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

Attracting funds from a Maximus lobbyist isn't exactly going to win her much support in a Corbynite Labour party. But then perhaps the other side of the election that won't matter?

FAREWELL to two Tory MPs and *Eye* favourites who have stood down ahead of the general election.

Isle of Wight MP Andrew Turner (famed for his expenses claims and colourful love life) was finally brought down by a 16-year-old student's Facebook post. The student had written about Turner's visit to her college, where he was asked about the Island's Pride festival in July. He replied he had turned down an invitation – because homosexuality is "wrong and dangerous to society".

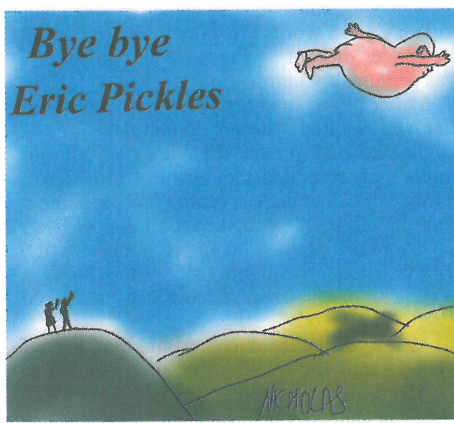
His fellow quitter is David Mackintosh, Northampton South MP, who was once named Philistine of the Year by the *Eye* for his part in flogging a 4,500-year-old Egyptian statue from the town's museum. He finally stood down as MP after criticism of his role in a £10.5m loan from the council to Northampton Town FC which is now subject of a police investigation.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£27,271 Average UK annual income

£25,767 Average annual income of authors

£25,000 Amount David Cameron spent on a shepherd's hut where he will write his memoirs

NO TEETH,
NO BITE

AFTER a long inquiry into the revolving door between Whitehall and business, parliament's public administration and constitutional affairs committee has reached the unsurprising conclusion that the failure to police the system has "damaged public trust in politics and public institutions and led to repeated scandals".

Among these were ex-chancellor George Osborne's recent move to BlackRock and others exposed by the *Eye* (which gave evidence to the committee), such as his former adviser Rupert Harrison's position at the same firm. Officials and mandarins, including former Treasury mandarin Sir John Kingman, were taking high-profile private sector positions in industries where they had had public influence without obtaining approval and with no sanctions for breaking the rules.

The advisory committee on business affairs (Acoba) that oversees the process for ministers and senior mandarins was, said MPs led by Tory Bernard Jenkin, "toothless". Jenkin's committee made a series of recommendations for reform, including greater resources for the watchdog to police compliance with its rulings on matters such as ex-public servants lobbying the government, and greater transparency for meetings between current and ex-Sir Humphreys.

Noting Lord Nolan's remarks in 1995 when the system was set up, that rule breaches could be exposed by "a free press using fair techniques of investigative journalism", the MPs also adopted a suggestion from the *Eye* that applications to Acoba should be made public. (Cases such as Harrison's and ex-HM Revenue & Customs boss Dave Hartnett's jobs with HSBC and Deloitte showed that what Acoba revealed publicly about the pair's prior involvement with their new employers did not match the reality.)

Perhaps most serious was the MPs' proposal that, as a rule, for at least two years public servants should not take jobs "in which there is a perceived conflict of interest with their past employment in the public service". As *Eye* 1426's special report *Public Servants, Private Paydays* showed last year, banning moves in this period would hit hundreds of former ministers and mandarins where it hurts: it is precisely the time private companies want their fresh inside knowledge.

It is doubtful whether the next government – which is likely to see plenty of ex-ministerial colleagues casting around for their own nice little earners and contain senior members who might question the wisdom of ruling out £650,000-a-year retirement jobs like Osborne's – actually takes such action. The public-private sector gravy train may well keep puffing along, even in a country that works for "the many not the privileged few".

CIVIL WAR

DH 2020, the government plan to make the Department of Health "smaller and better", has had a disastrous impact on morale, led to an early exodus of 500 experienced staff and left 340 vacancies unfilled.

A report prepared by departmental insider now questions whether the hastily introduced restructuring programme, leading to huge redundancy payouts, skills shortages and the need to recruit more expensive agency staff, has delivered any of the government's aims – let alone the 30 percent savings it was seeking. It says that no formal assessment in terms of time, costs or productivity has been made, but suggests that redundancy payments alone are expected to be in the region of £30m to £40m.

While some older staff were happy to take voluntary redundancy after years of service, others subsequently felt driven to go. Those left behind faced a 3,500-word competency-based job application – with the target score set at a higher level than other government departments. They were left feeling "bruised", struggling to cover for the vacant positions, with some taking over years of complex work with only the briefest handover.

Inevitably the report raised the question of why health secretary Jeremy Hunt drove through the changes so quickly when other departments are taking longer to reach their cutback targets. But it has earned him the honour of running the most miserable department in Whitehall, with 96.9 percent who took part in a civil service survey saying working life was deteriorating. That just pips Michael Fallon's Ministry of Defence, with 94.1 percent.

COURT CIRCULAR

THERESA MAY and her team are proving remarkably clumsy when it comes to dealing with the Queen.

First May dragged Brenda into the political sphere, using her as a pawn to lure Donald Trump over on a state visit, earning Downing Street a rebuke from the palace. Then she went all presidential and announced an election without mentioning Brenda, prompting anger in Buck House and forcing Downing Street to issue hurried clarifications stating that the two women had already spoken by phone and the Queen was fine with everything. Not so.

In the rush to call an election, no one in Downing Street appeared to notice that it clashed with the Spanish state visit. Number 10 hurriedly assured a curious palace and the media that the visit was still on – except it wasn't. Three days later came news that the visit was being postponed until July. That was always going to be the case. May's determination to spring a surprise meant diplomats had no chance to alert Madrid and begin to rearrange dates. The Queen is not amused.

Now May's eagerness to bring the new parliament into session quickly means one of the highlights of Brenda's year, Garter Day at Windsor Castle, has been cancelled so she can do the state opening. The timetable seems unnecessarily hasty, and President May seems to presume there won't be delays caused by a hung parliament. At the 2015 election there were 22 days between the poll and the state opening. This year there are just 11.

Spare a thought for poor Brian. The state opening and Garter Day could have both taken place had Brenda been prepared to delegate one of them to her heir, but she's determined to hold on to her major ceremonial roles.

'Flunkey