

Parliament in Commonwealth Countries Module:

Opposition, MP & Parliamentary Staff Roles

Week 4: March 30, 2009

Learning Objectives

At the end of this week, you should be able to meet the following learning objectives:

- Understand why an opposition in a democracy, is considered a necessary part of the legislative framework;
- Understand the various ways which an opposition may be perceived by the government, the media and society;
- Appreciate the manner in which even a numerically small opposition may influence parliamentary processes;
- Understand the duties of parliamentary staff in providing the support which an opposition needs to fulfill its role.
- Understand the differing roles which an MP is called upon to play in parliament;
- Compare the MP's responsibilities in these different roles;
- Describe how the responsibilities can vary according to the expectations of the electorate that chooses an MP;
- Discuss the ways in which parliamentary staff may be called upon to support MPs in their work in parliament.

Instructions:

Step 1: Read

Begin this week by reading **Unit 7: The Role of the Opposition** and **Unit 8: The Role of MPs and Parliamentary Staff**. As you will see, we shall have the

opportunity to examine the work of an MP and, as a particular case, how opposition MPs may fare in a legislature for which we study also the role of the opposition in a modern democratic parliament.

Step 2: Respond

Work through the end of unit questions for unit 7 and 8. The answers to Unit 7, questions numbered 3 and 4, and Unit 8, questions numbered 1 and 2 will be listed in the self test. The remaining questions (numbers 1 and 2 of Unit 7 and numbers 3 and 4 of Unit 8) are taken up for e-discussion in the Forum – see Step 4 below.

Step 3: Self-Test

Test your work against the responses listed in the 'self-test' posted on the website's Workbook page. These sample answers will be posted in the course of Week 4.

Step 4: E-Discussion

There are four e-discussion questions for this week and they are related to the content of Units 7 and 8.

The questions are:

- 1. What roles may the opposition be called upon to play in the passage of legislation initiated by the government?**
- 2. How should the government ensure that the opposition is adequately resourced to carry out its functions?**
- 3. Do you consider that MPs are sufficiently active in your country or legislature in performing the duties associated with parliamentary oversight?**
- 4. What training should be given to the various members of parliamentary staff to enable them to carry out their functions better?**

Comment by Moderator

Participants who work in legislatures will probably have come across the type of situation envisaged in the questions but may not have had the time or opportunity to look at them in detail. Comments from other participants may help to concentrate our minds!

As I said last week, please do not feel that you have to confine your comments to the parliament of your country or the legislature you work in, **You are free to discuss any parliament of your choice whose operations you are familiar with and you need not name it unless you want to.** In other words, you may, if you wish, discuss a question in general rather than in specific terms, especially if this will help you to be freer in your discussion.