

**Climbing the Greasy Pole:  
Achieving Cabinet Office in the UK, 1945-2015**

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I am inclined to think that Ministers of Government require almost as much education in their trade as shoe makers or tallow chandlers. I doubt whether you can make a good public account of a man simply because he has got the ear of the House of Commons...from Walpole down...you will find that all who have been of real use had early training as public servants...They seated themselves in office as soon as they left college (Anthony Trollope).<sup>1</sup>

In 1959, F. M. G. Willson published an article prefaced by a quotation from Trollope; it is a quotation that bears repeating. Willson showed that achieving Cabinet office was normally preceded by ‘years of service to Parliament and party’ and a good deal of ministerial experience.’ In 1970, he published a short piece updating his analysis and concluded ‘...the pattern not only remains overwhelmingly similar...but if anything has moved slightly towards more orthodoxy in terms of parliamentary and administrative experience...’.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent research has tended to concentrate on the role of ministers more widely and on their career paths or on their role and experience in Cabinet office in particular,<sup>3</sup> although a more focus has been the numerically small but significant number of Cabinet ministers whose parliamentary and ministerial experience has been more limited than the norms set out by Willson, particularly by the fact that many of them had previously served as aides to ministers, opposition frontbenchers or MPs.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will update and widen the Willson data, but more importantly examine how the opportunity structures for would-be politicians have changed

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn*, Oxford University Press, 1999 (originally published 1869), p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. G. Willson, ‘Entry to the Cabinet, 1959-68’, *Political Studies*, XVIII, 1970, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Bruce Headey, *British Cabinet Studies: the Roles of Politicians in Executive Office*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1974, James E. Alt, ‘Continuity, Turnover and Experience in the British Cabinet, 1868-1970’ in Valentine Herman and James E. Alt (eds.), *Cabinet Studies: A Reader*, Macmillan, London, 1975, pp. 33-54, and Richard Rose, ‘The making of Cabinet ministers’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 1, 1971, pp. 403 and 404.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Philip Cowley, ‘Arise novice leader! The continuing rise of the career politician in British politics’, *Politics*, 32, 2012, pp. 31-8 and Judi Atkins, Timothy Heppell and Kevin Theakston, ‘The career trajectories of Cabinet members in British government from Attlee to Cameron’, *Political Quarterly*, 84, 2013, pp. 362-70.

between 1945 and 2015. It has long been argued that certain occupations provide valuable experience for would-be politicians, often described as ‘brokerage occupations’, such the legal profession, especially barristers, teaching, especially secondary, further and higher education, and journalism. Other experience, however, – working for, a pressure group or a think tank, in public relations or as a political consultant, or serving in a sub-national or supra-national legislature - can be added. Experience in these and the more traditional brokerage occupations have been lumped together as ‘politics-facilitating occupations’.

Paul Cairney offers a further refinement by distinguishing between brokerage and ‘instrumental occupations, which have a clearer links to politics and may be used as a stepping stone towards elected office’.<sup>5</sup> He includes among instrumental occupations full-time local councillors and, for the Labour Party in particular, full-time trade union officials. This refinement is helpful in making the distinction between those occupations that help develop skills such as public speaking, presentation and analysis and those which directly involve political or quasi-political activity. For would-be ministers being a Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) – acting as an unpaid aide to a minister but becoming part of the governmental machine – offers another opportunity structure. Experience as a PPS may lead to junior or middle-rank ministerial office. Advancement up the ministerial hierarchy is not a pre-requisite of Cabinet office, but it is the commonest route. Of course, this route is only possible if the party of the would-be Cabinet ministers is in power at the time, but appointment as an opposition frontbencher can provide additional or alternative useful experience.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Cairney, The professionalization of MPs: refining the “politics-facilitating” explanation’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60, 2007, p. 214. See also Eric Shaw, ‘New pathways to Parliament’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 54, 2001, pp. 35-53.

## Ministerial careers and opportunity structures

Table 1: *Pre-parliamentary and intra-parliamentary opportunity structures in the recruitment of British Cabinet ministers 1945-2015*

<i>Pre-parliamentary opportunity structures</i>	<i>Relevance</i>
Local government experience	Experience of elective office; policy-making, legislative and executive decision-making; party politics.
Trade union office	Executive decision-making; policy-making; Labour party politics.
Party office	Executive decision-making; contact with leaders and senior party members; party politics.
Pressure group posts	Policy-making and development; contacts with leaders and senior party members.
Think tanks	Policy-making and development; contact with leaders and senior party members.
Special advisers	Policy-making and development; contacts with ministers and/or opposition frontbenchers; experience of civil service, Whitehall machine and Parliament; party politics.
Research assistant to Member of Parliament	Experience of Parliament, party politics; contacts with MPs and ministers and/or opposition frontbenchers.
Membership of the European Parliament (MEP) or a devolved legislature (MSP, AM, MLA).	Legislative experience; ministerial or opposition frontbench experience in a devolved legislature.
<i>Intra-parliamentary opportunity structures</i>	
Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS)	Observing executive-decision-making, contact with ministers and civil servants, party leaders and senior party members; liaison with backbenchers; party politics.
Junior or middle-rank ministerial posts	Direct ministerial experience, including responsibility for one or more policy areas; contact with other ministers, civil servants and senior party members; occasional attendance at Cabinet; parliamentary responsibility for the presentation and defence of government policy; party politics.
Opposition frontbenchers	Party responsibility for one or more policy areas; contact with the party leader and senior party members; parliamentary responsibility for the presentation of party policy.

In the language of political recruitment these various experiences are termed opportunity structures and may be defined as societal factors and activities that facilitate achieving political office.<sup>6</sup> Opportunity structures can be divided into pre-parliamentary and intra-parliamentary occupations and activities (see in Table 1).

<sup>6</sup> For their application in this regard see Michael Rush, *Politics and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology*, Harvester-Wheatsheaf and Prentice-Hall, Hemel Hempstead, 1992, pp.130 and 135-9 and Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski, *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 21-31.

Membership of Parliament is, of course, crucial to achieving ministerial office and therefore to membership of the Cabinet. A minister who lacks membership of Parliament must either be made a member of the House of Lords or secure election to the House of Commons, if necessary through a by-election, as Ernest Bevin did in 1940 and Frank Cousins in 1965.<sup>7</sup> However, the importance of the House of Lords as a locus for ministers, particularly Cabinet ministers has declined. In 1900, the post of Prime Minister was held by a peer, Lord Salisbury, but no peer has held that office since Salisbury's resignation in 1902. Similarly, most senior Cabinet posts are now held by MPs. And, following the abolition of the office, though not the title, of Lord Chancellor<sup>8</sup> in 2005, there is no absolute requirement for the Cabinet to include a peer, although it had been the practice for the Leader of the House of Lords to be in the Cabinet.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the government needs representatives in the Lords to handle its business, so that peers still comprise a significant proportion of ministers overall, but it has declined from 45.0 per cent in 1900 to 20.3 per cent in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Membership of Parliament, primarily of the House of Commons, is therefore a virtual pre-requisite of ministerial office, but the opportunity structures outlined in Table 1, while not pre-requisites, provide valuable experience en route. Indeed, each of the pre-parliamentary opportunity structures provides valuable experience for would-be MPs.

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<sup>7</sup> Bevin, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) was appointed Minister of Labour in the War Cabinet in May 1940 and elected MP for Wandsworth Central at a by-election in June 1940, following the resignation of Harry Nathan (Lab.), who was elevated to the House of Lords. Cousins, also General Secretary of the TGWU, was unexpectedly appointed Minister of Technology in Harold Wilson's Cabinet of 1964 and elected in January 1965, following a by-election vacancy created by the elevation of Frank Bowles (Lab.) to the Lords. This can sometimes backfire, as it did in 1965, when Patrick Gordon Walker, appointed Foreign Secretary in 1964, lost a by-election in January 1965.

<sup>8</sup> The Lord Chancellor was head of the judiciary, Speaker of the House of Lords and had to be a qualified lawyer as well a member of the Cabinet.

<sup>9</sup> However, in 2014 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, appointed Baroness Stowell Leader of the Lords but without a seat in the Cabinet, but May 2015, on forming a new government, he reappointed Lady Stowell Leader of the Lords but with a seat in the Cabinet.

<sup>10</sup> David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts, 1900-2010*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hants. P. 79.

## Pre-parliamentary opportunity structures

### *Local government experience*

Pre-election local government experience has long been common among MPs, especially in the Labour and Liberal/Liberal Democratic Parties: in 2010, 49.8 per cent of MPs had served as local councillors before first elected, 42.5 per cent of Conservative, 55.8 per cent of Labour and 59.6 per cent of Liberal Democrat MPs.<sup>11</sup>

Table 2: *Local government experience of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
42.3	17.1	28.1	30.0	33.3	20.0	41.2	22.2 21.4 (Con.) 25.0 (LD)

Given the proportion of Labour MPs with local government experience – in 1945 it was 44 per cent compared with 19 per cent Conservative, it is hardly surprising that newly-appointed Labour Cabinet ministers since 1945 had greater local government experience than their Conservative counterparts, but what Table 2 also shows is that in both parties Cabinet ministers are less likely to have had such experience than MPs. The same picture emerges if Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers between 2010 and 2015 are compared with Liberal Democrat MPs – only two of the eight Cabinet ministers had served as local councillors against nearly three-fifths of MPs. In short, as an opportunity structure local government experience is more important for Labour and the Liberal Democrats and for MPs generally than for Cabinet ministers.

<sup>11</sup> The proportions in 1997 were 32.7 per cent Conservative, 63.2 per cent Labour and 56.5 per cent Liberal Democrat; for 2001 30.3 per cent Conservative, 64.1 per cent Labour and 59.6 per cent Liberal Democrat; and for 2005 35.4 per cent Conservative, 61.7 per cent., Labour and 61.3 per cent Liberal Democrat.

*Trade union office*

While local government provides an important opportunity structure for would-be Labour MPs, trade union office provides an almost exclusive one. Trade unionists are active in all the major parties, but the unions were, of course, instrumental in the founding of the Labour Party. In fact, the 1918 Labour Party Constitution required Labour Party parliamentary candidates to be a member of a bone fide trade union, if eligible, and trade union membership was and remains almost universal among Labour MPs. Of much greater importance is that it provides the opportunity for direct experience of involvement in Labour Party activity as trade union officials and many Labour MPs before and after 1945 had pre-election careers as full-time union officials. Most were manual workers in unions represented by the unions in which they became officials. Later, however, a new type of union official emerged, one who was not originally linked to the union by occupation but employed from the start as a full-time official. The overall proportion of Labour MPs who had been union officials has varied little since 1945, when it was 12.5 per cent; in 2010, it was 11.2 per cent.<sup>12</sup> If, in the case of 2010, account is taken of Labour MPs who have been full-time officials at some point before entering Parliament (as distinct from the formative occupations recorded by Mellors and Criddle), then the proportion of trade union officials increases to 16.3 per cent. More pertinently, however, more than three-fifths (61.9 per cent) were not previously occupationally linked to their unions. Of the rest, 21.4 per cent represented white collar unions and only 14.3 per cent industrial unions to which they were occupationally linked.

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<sup>12</sup> The figure for 1945 is taken from Colin Mellors, *The British MP*, Saxon House, Farnborough, Hants. 1978, p. 673, Table 5.2 and the 2010 figure from Byron Criddle., Byron Criddle, 'MPs and Candidates: More Diverse, Yet more Uniform' in Dennis Kavanagh and Philip Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, p. 327, Table 15.6.

Table 3: *Proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers with experience as full-time trade union officials, 1945-2010 (Labour only)*

1945-51	1964-70	1974-79	1997-2010
42.3	18.8	9.5	10.3

The data in Table 3 show a dramatic decline in the number of ministers with experience as full-time trade union officials when first appointed to the Cabinet, whereas the decline in the number of union officials who become Labour MPs has remained largely steady – the lower proportion for 1997 is a consequence of Labour’s landslide victory and the proportion returned to the post-war norm in 2010. What Table 3 does not show is the marked decline in Labour Cabinets of union officials from unions linked to their previous occupations: ten out of eleven union officials appointed to the Cabinet between 1945 and 1951 had worked in occupations represented by their union; between 1997 and 2010 five of the seven Cabinet ministers who had been full-time union officials were graduates with no such occupational link. Furthermore, industrial unions predominated between 1945 and 1951, with nine out of eleven; between 1997 and 2010 the figure was two out of seven.

Local government experience and trade union activity are common to a significant minority of MPs, a majority in the Labour Party, but although other opportunity structures may apply to fewer MPs, they are closer to the centre of national politics.

#### *Party officials and researchers*

All the major parties have some full-time workers or officials and the Conservative and Labour Parties have long employed full-time research staff. However, in Labour’s case party rules have restricted the ability of such staff to embark on a parliamentary career, either precluding them from standing for Parliament while retaining their party posts or by imposing



a minimum time limit in the post before seeking selection as a parliamentary candidate.<sup>13</sup> The Conservative Party has never imposed such limits and John Ramsden in his study of the Conservative Research Department (CRD) mentions 26 MPs who worked in the CRD, mainly as research officers, between 1945 and 1974 and describes the CRD as ‘...a valuable training ground for future politicians.’<sup>14</sup> In 2010, 10.9 per cent of MPs, varying little between the parties – 12.1 per cent of Conservatives, 10.1 per cent of Labour MPs, and 10.5 per cent of Liberal Democrats had had full-time party positions, but with the CRD playing a much more significant role among Conservatives than Labour’s Research Department among Labour Members.

Table 4: *Proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers with experience as full-time party officials or researchers, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
3.8	9.8	6.3	5.0	4.8	12.3	14.7	22.2 17.9 (Con.) 37.5 (LD)

The role of the CRD under R. A. Butler in developing Conservative policy between 1945 and 1951 is well-known and the presence of Iain Macleod, Reginald Maudling and Enoch Powell, all former CRD officers, in post-1951 Conservative Cabinets is often cited, but CRD ‘graduates’ were less prominent in the short-lived Heath government of 1970-74, but more prominent again between 1979 and 1997 and 2010 and 2015. In Labour’s case, Cabinet ministers benefiting from these opportunity structures were less prominent for reasons already explained, until more recently when individuals such as Patricia Hewitt (Press Secretary 1983-87 and Policy Co-ordinator to Neil Kinnock while Leader of the Opposition 1989-94),

<sup>13</sup> In 1951, the Labour Party introduced a rule that headquarters officials had to have served at least five years before seeking selection (Michael Rush, *The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates*, Nelson, London, 1969, p. 227. Nonetheless, five heads of the Labour Party’s Research Department and two heads of its International Department became MPs between 1945 and 1964 – Wilfred Fienbrugh, David Ginsburg, Peter Shore, Denis Healey, and David Ennals.

<sup>14</sup> John Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Policy: the Conservative Research Department since 1929*, Longman, London, 1980, pp. 6-7.

Charles Clarke (Chief of Staff to Neil Kinnock while Leader of the Opposition 1983-92), Peter Mandelson (Labour Party Director of Campaigns and Communication 1985-90), and David Miliband (Head of the Leader of the Opposition's Policy Office 1994-97) entered the Cabinet between 1997 and 2006.<sup>15</sup> As opportunity structures, positions as party officials and researchers have varied but remain important, but researchers were more important than officials, particularly after periods when the party concerned has been in opposition, as with the Conservatives in 1951-64, 1979-97 and 2010-15 and Labour 1997-2010.

While party officials and researchers have fluctuated in importance, pressure groups and think tanks have been growth areas in British politics in recent decades, even though a some of the earliest examples of pressure groups can be found in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

### *Pressure group officials*

Defining and determining the number of pressure groups is difficult, since many organisations engage in 'pressure politics' but would not necessarily accept that they are pressure groups. Nevertheless, they can be numbered in their thousands rather than hundreds. For the purposes of this paper, organisations that clearly seek to influence public policy have been regarded as pressure groups. Relationships between MPs and pressure groups, both before election and after, are common, but actually working for a group much less so and the focus here is on those who have served as full-time officials or workers in such organisations. In 2010, 8.9 per cent of MPs had had experience as full-time officials or workers in pressure groups, but there were significant party differences, with Conservatives least likely to have had such experience (6.5 per cent), followed by Liberal Democrats (12.3 per cent), both well behind Labour's 17.1 per cent.

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<sup>15</sup> Three of the eight (37.5 per cent) Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers and six (10.5 per cent) of the 57 Liberal Democrat MPs had worked a party officials or researchers.

<sup>16</sup> See Graham Wootton, *Pressure Groups in Britain 1720-1970: An Essay in Interpretation with Original Documents*, Allen Lane, London, 1975).

Table 5: *Proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers with experience as full-time officials or workers in pressure groups, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
3.8	0.0	0.0	5.0	4.8	0.0	14.7	16.7 17.9 (Con.) 12.5 (LD)

It is clear from the figures in Table 5 that working for a pressure group was not common experience among Cabinet ministers appointed before 1997; there were some,<sup>17</sup> but during the Labour government of 1997-2010 the number of Cabinet ministers who had been employed by pressure groups rose to 14.7 per cent. They included John Denham, who had worked for Friends of the Earth, War on Want, the Energy Advice Centre, Christian Aid and Oxfam, among others, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt, both of whom had worked for the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty),<sup>18</sup> David Miliband, who was press officer for the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (1987-88), and Baroness Ashton, who was an administrator for CND (1977-83) as well as a number of other pressure groups. The proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers between 2010 and 2015 with pressure group experience also increased to 16.7 per cent. These included Andrew Lansley, who was Deputy Director then Director of Policy for the British Chambers of Commerce (1987-90) and Caroline Spelman, who worked for the NFU (1981-84) and then for the International Federation of European Beetgrowers (1984-89).

Clearly, some pressure groups are much closer to the centre of politics and some are closer to a particular party than others, but all provide useful political experience for those with political ambitions and their importance as opportunity structures has increased.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. David Ennals, Secretary of State for Social Services 1976-79, was Secretary of the United Nations Association (1952-57), Campaigns Director of MIND (1970-73) and John Davies, who served in Edward Heath's Cabinet from 1970 to 1974, and was Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry (1965-69).

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Hewitt also worked for Age Concern.

*Think tanks*

Think tanks can be seen as a particular type of pressure group and, like the latter, have been a political growth area in recent decades. Many are politically-neutral, such as the Royal Institute of International Affairs (colloquially known as Chatham House), the Policy Studies Institute (formerly Political and Economic Planning), the Hansard Society, the Institute for Strategic Studies, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and the recently-established Institute for Government. Others have a clear position on the ideological spectrum, sometimes involving close party links. The oldest by far is the Fabian Society, founded in 1884 and therefore predating both the Independent Labour Party (1893) and the Labour Party (1900), but now clearly identified with the latter. Its Conservative equivalent is the Bow Group, dating from 1951. MPs and ministers have frequently held office in both organisations and W. T. Rodgers and Shirley Williams, who served as General Secretary of the Fabian Society in 1953-60 and 1960-64 respectively, were Cabinet ministers during the 1974-79 Labour government.<sup>19</sup> Membership of both the Fabian Society and the Bow Group continues to be widespread among Labour and Conservative MPs, but the widening of the ideological gap between the parties in the 1970s and periods in opposition have tended to produce more ideologically identifiable think tanks. For the Conservatives bodies such as the Centre for Policy Studies (1974), the Social Market Foundation (1989), the European Foundation (1992), Policy Exchange (2002), and the Centre for Social Justice (2004) illustrate the trend and for Labour, the Institute of Public Policy Research (1988), Demos (1995), and the Smith Institute (1996).

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<sup>19</sup> Two other Labour MPs since 1945 – Donald Chapman (Birmingham-Northfield 1951-70) and, more recently, Stephen Twigg (Enfield-Southgate 1997-2005 and Liverpool-West Derby 2010- ) have been General Secretary of the Fabian Society.

Table 6: *Proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers with experience as full-time officials or researchers in think tanks, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.5	3.1	7.4	8.3 7.1 (Con.) 12.5 (LD)

The data in Table 6 focuses on Cabinet ministers who have worked full-time for think tanks and excludes membership and holding elective office; inclusion of the latter would make the proportions considerably higher. Although the proportions are small, they illustrate the growth in the diversification of pre-parliamentary opportunity structures. Think tanks also lap over into the intra-parliamentary opportunity structures, not only because many MPs maintain membership of or contacts with bodies like the Bow Group and the Fabian Society, but also in being involved in the setting up of new think tanks. In 1974, for example, Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher were two of the co-founders<sup>20</sup> of the Centre for Policy Studies, established to promote neo-liberal ideas and policies. Similarly, in 2004, Iain Duncan Smith, former Leader of the Conservative Party, founded the Centre for Social Justice, which has played a major role in the development of Conservative welfare policy.

#### *Research assistants or aides*

Historically, a small number of politicians have long had the assistants or aides, whether as private secretaries, research devils and the like, who went on to become MPs and ministers, but the widespread availability of such posts is a much more recent phenomenon, providing yet another pre-parliamentary opportunity structure. In 1969, only a handful of MPs had research assistants, but with the introduction of a secretarial allowance, which could be used to fund research assistants, numbers began to rise: by 1978 two-fifths of MPs employed research assistants and by 1991 it was three-fifths, and the opportunity for would-be MPs to

<sup>20</sup> The other co-founder was Sir Alfred Sherman, a journalist, political activist and adviser.

gain direct experience of Westminster expanded enormously, with similar experience also available via the European Parliament and the UK's devolved legislatures. Such experience took time to filter through to that of Cabinet ministers, so that no Cabinet ministers appointed before 1997 had had experience as research assistants. Among those first appointed between 1997 and 2010, however, 13.2 per cent had had such experience and between 2010 and 2015 8.3 per cent (Conservatives (7.1 per cent and Liberal Democrats 12.5 per cent), mostly at Westminster. For MPs the proportions in the 2010-15 Parliament were 5.2 per cent Conservative, 15.5 per cent Labour, and 7.4 per cent Liberal Democrat.

### *Special advisers*

A similar expansion took place in the number of special advisers or 'SpAds' to ministers, political appointees paid from public funds. Their numbers began to expand in the 1970s, initially under Labour, falling back under Margaret Thatcher and rising again after her departure in 1990. In February 1997 there were 38; by 2001-02 there were 81 and in October 2013 98.<sup>21</sup> As with research assistants, experience as a SpAd took time to filter through, but it has been a significant feature of the career pattern of Cabinet ministers since 1979. In 1979-1997 15.4 per cent of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers had been special advisers, in 1997-2010 16.2 per cent, and in 2010-15 16.7 per cent (14.3 per cent Conservatives, 25.0 per cent (Liberal Democrats). These figures include those who had had experience as advisers to opposition frontbenchers, which though privately funded became more common as the number of ministerial advisers increased. For example, John McGregor (1965-68), Douglas Hurd (1968-70), and William Waldegrave (1974-75) served as Head of Edward Heath's

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<sup>21</sup> David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts Since 1979*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hants., 2006, p. 140; Committee on Standards in Public Life, *Ninth Report: Defining the Boundaries within the Executive: Ministers, Special Advisers and the permanent Civil Service*, Cm. 5775, April 2003, p.50; and Oonagh Gay, *Special Advisers*, House of Commons Library Standard Note, SN/PC/03813, 21 Nov. 2013.

Political Office when he was Leader of the Opposition. Yvette Cooper, was economic research assistant to John Smith (1990-92) when he was Leader of the Opposition, and subsequently policy adviser to Labour's Treasury team (1992-94); Ed Balls was economic adviser to Gordon Brown, Labour's Shadow Chancellor (1994-97); David Miliband was Head of the Policy Office when Tony Blair was Leader of the Opposition; and George Osborne was Secretary of the Shadow Cabinet and Political Secretary to William Hague (1997-2001) when the latter was Leader of Opposition. With the exception of Yvette Cooper, each had also subsequently or previously served as a special adviser to a minister.

*Membership of the European Parliament or a devolved legislature*

Away from Westminster membership of the European Parliament or one of the UK's devolved legislatures provides yet another opportunity structure. It is not a particularly common route to the Cabinet, although movement between the European Parliament and Westminster or vice-versa is somewhat more common. There was a flurry of movement from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales when they were set up in 1999, but little in the opposite direction, while dual membership of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster was commonplace for a number of years. Thus, only four former MEPs – Geoff Hoon (Lab.), Theresa Villiers (Cons.), and Nick Clegg and Chris Huhne (LDs), and only one member of a devolved legislature – Stephen Crabb (Cons.), previously a member of the National Assembly for Wales, have followed this route.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> David Mundell (Cons.) was a member of the Scottish Parliament (1999-2005) before his election Westminster in 2005 and appointed Secretary of State for Scotland after the 2015 general election, so that he is not included in the data presented in this paper. Alun Michael became a member of the National Assembly for Wales and was appointed First Secretary for Wales in 1999 (i.e. head of the devolved administration), but this was *after* he had served in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Wales (1998-99).

*Pre-parliamentary opportunity structures: an overview*Table 7: *The proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers with experience of pre-parliamentary opportunity structures, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
46.2	12.2	25.0	10.0	23.8	27.7	48.5	53.8 (Coa.) 42.9 (Con.) 87.5 (LD)

*Note:* The percentages shown represent the number of *individuals* with such experience and not the aggregate of those with experience of more than opportunity structure.

Experience of particular pre-parliamentary opportunity structures has for the most part involved small number of Cabinet ministers in the period 1945-2015, but taken together they constitute significant proportion of the total. Furthermore, the nature of that experience has changed markedly over the period, even though similar proportions of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers had had such experience in 1945-51 – 46.2 per cent and 2010-15 – 52.8 per cent, the high Labour figure at the beginning of the period is accounted for almost entirely by Cabinet ministers with experience as full-time trade union officials. And, not only has the proportion of trade union officials among Labour Cabinet ministers declined to around 10 per cent but, as already noted, more recent appointees are mainly graduates who have been recruited horizontally rather than vertically through union ranks. More importantly, for most of the period Labour Cabinet ministers were more likely to have had such pre-parliamentary experience, but in 2010-15 the Conservatives were close on Labour’s heels at 42.9 per cent.

The growth of pre-parliamentary opportunity structures is striking, both in range and proportionately, but what is more striking is the number of individuals with experience of more than one of these opportunity structures. Between 1945 and 1979 only two newly-appointed Cabinet ministers had experience of more than one of these opportunity structures; in 1979-97 the proportion was 10.9 per cent; in 1997-2010 19.1 per cent; and in 2010-15 30.6 per cent (Cons. 28.6 and LDs 37.5 per cent). These figures are evidence of the growing number of what may be termed ‘career politicians’, a theme to be explored later.



### **Intra-parliamentary opportunity structures**

Once in Parliament, further opportunity structures become available to would-be Cabinet ministers – appointment as opposition frontbenchers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries (PPSs), and ministers outside the Cabinet. All three have growth areas since 1945.

The concept of an official opposition developed during the nineteenth century, but that of a ‘Shadow Cabinet’ developed much later, beginning with Labour in 1955.<sup>23</sup> At first the number of opposition frontbenchers (OFBs), including the Shadow Cabinet, was small compared with the government: in 1955 Labour had 39 OFBs and it was still only 40 in 1961-62, covering both Lords and Commons, but with more in the latter. The number had only risen to 54 for the Conservative opposition of 1976-77, but in due course the number of opposition posts matched that of the government and as governments grew so did the number of OFBs. Indeed, in 2014 Labour’s Shadow Cabinet of 27 was larger than the actual Cabinet and the total number of OFBs, excluding whips, was 122, again larger than the government as a whole.

Once a party is in power, appointment as a PPS or a minister outside the Cabinet becomes a possibility and these too have increased. The number of PPSs and the number of ministers outside the Cabinet has increased by 70.3 per cent (27 to 40) and ministers outside the Cabinet by 50.8 per cent (63 to 95) between 1950 and 2010.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Leaders of the Opposition have appointed PPSs, usually two, and in 2010-15 some Labour OFBs also appointed PPSs, though how widespread this practice is remains unclear.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Malcolm Punnett, *Frontbench Opposition*, Heinemann, London, 1973, Chap. 3.

<sup>24</sup> This is substantially more than the number of Cabinet posts – 18 in 1945 and 23 in 2010, an increase of 33.3 per cent.

<sup>25</sup> At least two MPs, Chris Evans and Seema Mulhotra, were publicly listed as PPSs to Labour OFBs during the 2010-15 Parliament, and Barbara Roche was similarly designated PPS to Margaret Becket, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party from 1992 to 1994. I am grateful to Richard Kelly and Sarah Priddy of the Parliament and Constitution Unit of the House of Commons Library for this information.

Table 8: *Proportion of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers with experience as opposition frontbenchers, PPSs and ministers outside the Cabinet, 1945-2015*

<i>Opport. struct.</i>	<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
OFB	26.9	9.8	71.9	85.0	90.5	42.2	61.8	88.9(Coa.) 85.7(Con.) 100.0(LD)
PPS	38.5	22.0	40.6	40.0	47.6	35.9	25.0	22.2(Coa.) 26.8(Con.) 0.0 (LD)
Non-Cab. min.	88.5	90.2	71.9	85.0	95.2	93.8	75.0	50.0(Coa.) 57.1(Con.) 25.0 (LD)

Table 8 shows, pre-Cabinet experience as OFBs, PPSs and non-Cabinet ministers is common but varies, largely because it depends on the extent to which a party has been in government or opposition. This applies to both short and long periods in government and opposition. Thus, 90.5 per cent of new entrants to the 1974-79 Labour Cabinet had had experience as OFBs and 95.2 per cent as minister outside the Cabinet, reflecting both thirteen years in opposition between 1951 and 1964 and six years in government between 1964 and 1970. Long periods in opposition, however, result in the attrition of those with opposition frontbench and pre-Cabinet ministerial experience because longer-serving OFBs and ex-ministers pass their ‘sell-by’ dates and because the opportunity for ministerial office has been absent. In 1964-70, for example, 71.9 per cent new Cabinet entrants had frontbench experience and the same proportion pre-Cabinet ministerial experience. Similarly, in 1997-2010, 61.8 per cent of Labour’s new entrants had had opposition frontbench experience, and 75.0 per cent non-Cabinet ministerial experience as Labour’s period in power extended. The Conservative position is similar: after a short period in opposition 80.5 per cent of 1970-74 new entrants had been OFBs and the same proportion had held pre-Cabinet ministerial office. In partial contrast, the 88.9 per cent of new Coalition ministers in 2010-15 had been OFBs, but only 50.0 per cent had pre-Cabinet ministerial experience. In short, while longer periods in opposition or government increase the number with OFB or non-Cabinet experience

respectively, these are subject to attrition, as new cohorts of MPs (and to a limited extent peers) become available.

Experience as a PPS is less subject to fluctuation and, while understandably regarded as the first step on the ministerial ladder and experienced by a substantial minority of new Cabinet entrants, is by no means a necessary step towards Cabinet office. However, it remains useful step towards ministerial office, but the latter remains the most important; all other pre-parliamentary opportunity structures are similarly useful but becoming more common as part of the UK's political career pattern.

### *Updating and extending Willson*

#### *Parliamentary service<sup>26</sup>*

Willson's 1959 study found that Cabinet ministers who had served as MPs and had first been appointed to the Cabinet between 1916 and 1958 had spent thirteen years in the House of Commons, rising to 14.5 years in the period 1958-68 before entering the Cabinet. Extrapolating that data to 2010-15 and covering the period since 1945 produces a mean of 12.3 years. Table 9 shows the mean parliamentary service before entry to the Cabinet and also before first appointment to ministerial office for each period of government:

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<sup>26</sup> Willson excluded peers from his analysis of parliamentary service, arguing that their experience in the House of Lords 'cannot be used safely in any quantitative assessment of pre-Cabinet parliamentary experience' (Willson, *The Routes of entry...*, p. 227). However, the availability of on the UK Parliamentary website of the Archived Lords Hansard ([www.parliament.uk/ArchivedLordsHansard,1803-2005](http://www.parliament.uk/ArchivedLordsHansard,1803-2005)) facilitates measuring the participation of peers. For this research, therefore, the participation of all peers first appointed to the Cabinet between 1945 and 2015 before calculating their parliamentary service before achieving ministerial or Cabinet office. Where appropriate, adjustments were made e.g. Lord Carrington's time as the UK's High Commissioner to Australia between 1956 and 1959 was excluded, although he did attend a Lords debate in 1958 (*HL Debs.*, 210, 9 July 1958, c. 797) and, similarly, the Earl of Gowrie succeeded to his peerage in 1955, but did not take his seat in the Lords until 1964, and this is also taken into account.

Table 9: *Mean number of years of parliamentary services served by newly-appointed Cabinet ministers before first ministerial appointment and before appointment to the Cabinet, 1945-2015(years)*

<i>Min. office</i>	<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
Non-Cabinet office	5.59	5.24	9.09	6.23	7.00	5.51	7.41	7.23(Coa.) 6.78(Con.) 8.83 (LD)
Cabinet office	10.87	12.69	14.82	12.55	14.13	12.23	11.24	10.95(Coa.) 11.37(Con.) 9.47 (LD)

*Note:* Unlike Willson's figures, those in the table include service in the House of Lord as well as the Commons (see footnote 48).

Inevitably, there are variations before achieving Cabinet office, ranging from 10.87 years in 1945-51 to 14.82 years in 1964-70, the latter the result of thirteen years in opposition. Although there are differences between Conservative and Labour by period of government, the mean figure for both is the same – 12.4 years, with Liberal Democrats on 9.5 years. Parliamentary service before first ministerial office also shows variations between periods, but these reflect party differences, with Conservatives having a mean of 5.8 years, Labour 7.4 years, and Liberal Democrats 8.8 years around a mean of 6.7 years. Of course, if the experience of individual ministers in examined much greater differences emerge: in the case of first ministerial appointments 0-22.3 years and Cabinet appointments 0-30.4 years. Pre-Cabinet parliamentary service is overwhelmingly the norm: 98.7 per cent of all new entrants to the Cabinet between 1945 and 2015 had some experience of Parliament, the only exceptions were Lords Alexander and Leathers in 1951, Frank Cousins in 1964, and Lord Young in 1984.

#### *Ministerial experience*

Analysing the pre-Cabinet ministerial experience of new Cabinet entrants between 1945 and 2015 produces a similar pattern. Willson found that between 1868 and 1916 the average pre-Cabinet ministerial experience was 3.5 years and between 1916 and 1958 4.5 years, and in his

1959-68 updating 3.5 years.<sup>27</sup> However, in the latter period Conservatives averaged six years, whereas Labour entrants 2.5 years, reflecting Conservative years in office and Labour in opposition. The comparable figures for 1945-2015 are Conservative 4.5 years and Labour 3.0, with an overall mean of 3.7, when the Liberal Democrats who had ministerial experience between 2010 and 2015 are included.

Table 10: *Ministerial experience of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers, 1945-2015(years)*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
3.40	4.86	2.28	3.54	4.34	5.65	2.85	1.54(Coa.) 1.79(Con.) 0.65(LD)

As with parliamentary service, there are party variations, but they are mostly related to lengths of periods in office and opposition. Thus, longer periods of office provide the opportunity for lower rank ministers to acquire experience before promotion to the Cabinet, as happened with the Conservatives 1951-64 (4.9 years) and 1979-97 (5.6 years). Short periods in opposition facilitate the entry to the Cabinet of those whose experience of non-Cabinet office stems from the party's previous period in government, as in Labour's case in 1974-79, following the Wilson government of 1964-70. Longer periods in opposition, of course, reduce the Cabinet chances of those whose lower-rank experience dates from when the party was last in power, as 1997-2010 (2.9 years) illustrates for Labour and 2010-15 (1.89 years) for the Conservatives. As with parliamentary service, the range varies widely, but with ministerial experience it is less wide, the smallest range being 0-5.9 years (1964-70) and the highest 0-15.3 years (1951-64).

<sup>27</sup> Willson, 'The routes of entry...', p.228 and 'Entry to the Cabinet 1959-68', p. 237.

*Age on ministerial appointment*

The pattern is repeated if the mean age on first ministerial and first Cabinet appointments is calculated, with 44.5 years for the former and 50.8 for the latter. There are only minor party differences – Conservatives having a mean age of 43.5 years for first ministerial appointments and 50.5 for Cabinet posts, compared to Labour’s 45.3 and 51.2, but overall the figures are remarkably consistent.

Table 11: *Mean age of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers on first ministerial appointment and first Cabinet appointment, 1945-2015 (years)*

<i>Min. office</i>	<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
Non-Cabinet office	47.0	44.6	46.9	42.4	42.4	42.5	44.9	45.6(Coa.) 45.0(Con.) 48.0 (LD)
Cabinet office	53.6	52.6	53.0	49.8	50.9	49.9	49.6	46.3(Coa.) 49.5(Con.) 48.6 (LD)

All this suggests that not much has changed since Willson’s two studies. His two principal findings – that Cabinet ministers serve parliamentary and ministerial apprenticeships before becoming members of the Cabinet – stand. Moreover, there has been little change in the length of these apprenticeships and this is reinforced by analysis of the age at which Cabinet ministers first achieve ministerial and then Cabinet office, but there have, in fact, been two important changes. The first is the decline in the number of members of the House of Lords who became Cabinet ministers and the second the growth of ‘career politicians’.

Table 12: *Proportion of peers among newly-appointed Cabinet ministers, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
19.2	24.4	6.3	10.0	9.5	12.5	13.2	10.7

In 1945-51, 19.2 per cent of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers were peers and in 1951-64 24.4 per cent. Thereafter the proportion dropped and the highest was 13.2 per cent in 1997-2010. The latter figure suggests a greater willingness on the part of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to appoint peers to Cabinet posts than any Labour government since 1945-51. Indeed, five of the nine peers who first entered the Cabinet between 1997 and 2010 were elevated under Blair's leadership, two under Neil Kinnock and two under John Smith.<sup>28</sup> The highest proportion in the 1945-1015 period was 24.4 per cent (1951-64) and was partly the result of Churchill's 1951-53 experiment with 'overlords' – Cabinet ministers with an overarching responsibility for several policy areas.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, the House of Lords has been found useful to most Prime Ministers as a means of appointing ministers, including Cabinet ministers, who are not members of the Commons and who either do not wish to seek election or for whom election does not offer easy and swift access to Parliament. For instance, businessmen such as Lord Inman (1945-51), Lord Mills (1951-64), and Lord Young (1979-97) became Cabinet ministers after little or no parliamentary service and no pre-Cabinet ministerial experience. Others have sought but failed to secure membership of the Commons – Lord Falconer (1997-2010) and Baroness Warsi (2010-15), for example. Yet others were hereditary peers who followed a similar route to MPs, accumulating parliamentary and ministerial experience in the Lords before entering the Cabinet,<sup>30</sup> while some were life peers with similar experience.<sup>31</sup> Finally, some peers who achieve Cabinet

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<sup>28</sup> In addition, Peter Mandelson, who had held Cabinet posts under Blair while an MP, re-entered the Cabinet in 2009 as First Secretary of State and Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, having been elevated to the Lords under Brown in 2008.

<sup>29</sup> See Peter Hennessy and David Welsh, 'Lords of all they surveyed? Churchill's ministerial "overlords" 1951-53', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 51, 1998, pp. 62-70.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. the Earl of Selkirk (1951-64), Lord Shepherd (1974-79), Lord Carrington (1970-74), the Earl of Gowrie (1979-97), and Lord Strathclyde (2010-15).

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Lord Williams of Mostyn, Lord Adonis, and Baronesses Amos, Ashton and Royall (1997-2010).

office have a combination of experience as MPs and peers, but enter the Cabinet as peers rather than MPs.<sup>32</sup>

In a number of cases peers achieving Cabinet office could be described as ‘fast-trackers’, individuals who became Cabinet ministers with limited or no parliamentary experience. Three have already been mentioned, Lords Inman, Mills and Young, but there are ‘fast-trackers’ among MPs. For example, Sir Walter Monckton, appointed Solicitor-General in Churchill’s ‘Caretaker Government’ of May-July 1945, was not an MP until 1951 when he entered the Cabinet; Frank Cousins, appointed Minister of Technology in 1964, was not an MP until January 1965; and John Davies, former Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry, elected in June 1970 and made Minister of Technology following the sudden death of Iain Macleod, Chancellor of the Exchequer, which occasioned a mini-reshuffle.

More commonly, however, ‘fast-trackers’ are younger, invariably highly-regarded individuals, who win rapid promotion to the Cabinet. There is no shortage of examples: Iain Macleod and Reginald Maudling (1951-64), Nigel Lawson, Michael Portillo and William Hague (1979-97), Peter Mandelson, David Miliband, Ed Balls, Ed Miliband, Andy Burnham and James Purnell (1997-2010), and Sajid Javid, Nicky Morgan, and Elizabeth Truss (2010-15). Such cases have increased in number and proportion between 1945 and 2010 and it is easy to equate ‘fast-trackers’ with ‘career politicians’, but not all ‘career politicians’ are ‘fast-trackers’, notwithstanding a significant overlap, and it is analytically better to deal with ‘career politicians’ as a distinct phenomenon.

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<sup>32</sup> E.g. Lord Pethick-Lawrence (1945-51), Lord Hailsham (1951-64), Lord Elwyn-Jones (1974-79), and Lord Cranborne (1979-97), and Lord Richard (1997-2010).



### **The growth of ‘career politicians’**

‘In the 1980s’, Anthony King argued, ‘career politicians are about the only politicians left in the upper echelons of British politics and government...[though they]...are not a new breed.’<sup>33</sup> His research shows that between 1945 and 1980 the proportion of career politicians among Cabinet ministers increased from 54.3 per cent in the Attlee government to 77.3 per cent in the Thatcher government.<sup>34</sup> ‘The break comes in about 1970. Before 1970, every Cabinet contained a substantial minority of non-career politicians; after 1970, none did,’<sup>35</sup> adding that increasingly the job of being a Member of Parliament was full-time.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, from the late 1960s onwards the pay of MPs and the services and facilities available to them had increased to the point that all MPs could be described as career politicians. Indeed, the term almost certainly applies to most, if not all members of the UK’s devolved legislatures and not a few local councillors. Consequently, King notes ‘increasingly...politicians without a great deal of first-hand experience of the world outside politics are running the country.’<sup>37</sup>

King’s assessment of who is and who is not a career politician is based on what he terms ‘their degree of commitment to political life’ and he accepts that ultimately this is subjective, but his results are compelling and only a substantial shift of cases on his continuum of commitment would make a significant difference. He points out that the number of Conservative and Labour MPs with ‘politics-facilitating’ occupations as ‘communicators’ (journalists, public relations personnel, lecturers and school teachers) had increased markedly between 1935 and 1979, but does not identify what proportion of Cabinet ministers fall within this category. Using King’s definition of ‘communicators’ reveals that

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<sup>33</sup> King. Op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Figs. 1-7, pp. 271-6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>36</sup> On the attitude of MPs towards being full-time see Michael Rush and Philip Giddings, *Parliamentary Socialisation: Learning the Ropes or Determining Behaviour?*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hants. 2011, pp. 102-4 and Appendix B, p. 221, Table B2.

<sup>37</sup> King, op. cit., p. 278.

there had indeed been an increase among Cabinet ministers, but higher among Labour than Conservative ministers and in the latter case was insignificant before 1979. Even so, most members of the Cabinet listed by King, including those categories as having ‘greater commitment’ politically had had a fair amount of ‘first-hand experience of the world outside politics’ and it worth exploring the position since 1970.

Bearing in mind that generally it is reasonable to describe MPs as ‘career politicians’ on the grounds that they are in practice full-time, receive commensurate back-up from the public purse, and that most serve for several Parliaments, it seems sensible to narrow the definition of ‘career politician’ to those whose pre-parliamentary experience consists entirely or substantially of politically-related occupations or activities. This is achieved by taking all newly-appointed Cabinet ministers between 1945 and 2015 who have substantial experience of the pre- and intra-parliamentary opportunity structures discussed earlier, excluding full-time trade union officials with an occupational link to their unions but including graduate full-time union officials (see Table 12).

Table 12: *proportion of ‘Career politicians’ among newly-appointed Cabinet ministers, 1945-2015*

<i>1945-51 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1951-64 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1964-70 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1970-74 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1974-79 (Lab.)</i>	<i>1979-97 (Cons.)</i>	<i>1997-10 (Lab.)</i>	<i>2010-15 (Coa.)</i>
0.0	9.8	6.3	0.0	14.3	17.2	36.8	36.1(Coa.) 28.6(Con.) 62.5 (LD)

The table confirms King’s view that 1970 marks a watershed, after which the trend is clearly upwards, reaching 36.8 for Labour in 1997-2010 and 36.1 for the Coalition in 2010-15. However, the Conservative proportion in the Coalition is somewhat lower, at 28.6 per cent, and the Liberal Democrat much higher at 62.5 per cent, although the number of Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers is small and the figure represents five out of eight. If account

is taken of the extent of occupational experience outside politics<sup>38</sup> a significant party difference emerges: a higher proportion of Labour career politicians have no or only limited experience outside politics, applying to 76.0 per cent of new Cabinet entrants in 1997-2010, compared with 62.5 per cent for Conservatives and 60.0 per cent of Liberal Democrats in 2010-15. And this is reinforced if Cabinet ministers are compared with MPs:

Table 13: *Proportion of 'career politicians' among Cabinet ministers and MPs*

<i>Party</i>	<i>Cabinet ministers</i>	<i>MPs</i>
Conservative	28.6	13.4
Labour	36.8	34.9
Liberal Democrat	62.5	12.3

*Note:* Conservative Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers refer those newly-appointed 2010-15, for Labour 1997-2010, and MPs to all those elected in 2010.

Table 13 shows that newly-appointed Conservative and Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers in 2010-15 were far more likely to be 'career politicians' than Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs, whereas in Labour's case the proportions of Cabinet ministers in 1997-2010 and MPs in 2010 are almost the same.

Further analysis shows that 'career politicians' normally achieve their first ministerial office and are first appointed to the Cabinet at a younger age than others, after less parliamentary service, but with a similar level of pre-Cabinet ministerial experience. There are only limited differences between the parties regarding age, although Labour ministers are likely to serve longer in Parliament but have less ministerial experience before joining the Cabinet.

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<sup>38</sup> I.e. no non-political occupational experience, less than 5 years, 5 years, more than 5 years.

Table 14: *Age, parliamentary service and ministerial experience of newly-appointed Cabinet ministers, 1997-2010 and 2010-15 (years)*

	<i>1997-2010</i>	<i>2010-15</i>
<i>Age on first min. office</i>		
Career politicians	42.1	42.8 (Coa.) 41.1 (Con.) 45.4 (LD)
Non-career politicians	46.5	47.3(Coa.) 46.5 (Con.) 52.3 (LD)
<i>Age on first Cabinet office</i>		
Career politicians	46.9	47.4 (Coa.) 48.4 (Con.) 45.8 (LD)
Non-career politicians	51.1	50.3 (Coa.) 49.9 (Con.) 53.3 (LD)
<i>Parl. service before min. office</i>		
Career politicians	5.43	6.33 (Coa.) 5.74 (Con.) 7.27 (LD)
Non-career politicians	8.57	7.74 (Coa.) 7.19 (Con.) 11.42 (LD)
<i>Parl. service before Cabinet office</i>		
Career politicians	9.94	10.50 (Coa.) 12.31 (Con.) 7.62 (LD)
Non-career politicians	12.00	11.20 (Coa.) 11.0 (Con.) 12.56 (LD)
<i>Min. experience before Cabinet off.</i>		
Career politicians	3.04	1.89 (Coa.) 2.86 (Con.) 0.35 (LD)
Non-career politicians	2.75	1.40 (Coa.) 1.37 (Con.) 1.61 (LD)

Career politicians, defined in terms of their pre-parliamentary and intra-parliamentary experience, are here to stay and appear to be growing in number and proportion. Whether this is a desirable or undesirable development is a matter of opinion. It applies not just to members of the Cabinet and ministers generally, but to MPs as well. Thus, while the norms of parliamentary service and ministerial preceding entry to the Cabinet hold and hold at much the same level as Willson found, the career politician is a much more recent phenomenon and has become a matter of public comment and concern. What perhaps began as a perception has become a reality, but has the perception has now become more important than the reality?