

TEXT OF TELEGRAPH LETTER

“Sir - At a time when trust in politicians continues to be diminished, there is an urgent need to look again at the sanctions available when an MP has been found to have behaved improperly.

The Commons Standards and Privileges Committee is able to suspend an MP, but many members of the public feel frustration that, save for very limited circumstances, an MP disciplined by the Commons authorities will not be answerable to his constituents until a general election is called and, therefore, can retain his position and salary for some years.

As Conservative MPs all elected for the first time in 2005, we recognise that we are accountable to our electorate and, consequently, we do not think that a parliamentary committee should have the discretion to expel an MP. However, we do think that consideration should be given to creating a recall mechanism, similar to that used in some US states, to enable constituents to vote on whether they remove their MP during the course of a Parliament.

For example, in California in 2003, a petition was organised calling for the recall of the governor, Gray Davis. Once it was established that a sufficient number of electors had signed the petition, a ballot was held on whether Davis should be recalled. That ballot succeeded, and Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected to replace him.

We would want safeguards to be put in place to ensure that this mechanism was not abused, such as requiring a high percentage of registered voters in a constituency to petition for a recall ballot, or only permitting a recall ballot when the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee has recommended it as a sanction.

None the less, a mechanism of this sort used in exceptional circumstances would increase MPs' accountability, address some of the frustration felt by a disenchanting public and help restore trust in our democratic institutions.”