

The news that two new UK Defence Ministers are to be unpaid has sent waves of disbelief around the defence establishment.

Quentin Davies MP, the new Minister for Defence Equipment and Support, "crossed the floor" to leave the Conservatives for Labour. He's the first minister for defence procurement to sit in the House of Commons since Labour first won the 1997 General Election. His former colleagues will no doubt have the greatest of sport at his expense, not least for being a "gentleman" rather than a "player". (For our global readers, many years ago unpaid cricketers were known as "gentlemen" while the paid professional were "players")

Kevan Jones MP, the new Minister for Veterans, is similarly in a salary free zone, but he's a man unknown for taking prisoners. Any Conservative having a go will get back in kind - and more. He had a reputation in local government of giving firm direction to the public servants who reported to him. It will be interesting to see if he can take that firmness of purpose with him to Main Building.

As befits him, his game plan may also be more subtle. By doing a stint as a defence minister, he breaks his service on the House of Commons Defence Committee, and could be very handily placed to serve two terms as its (paid) chairman after the next General Election. Some pundits are predicting that if the Conservatives win it, they need look no further than its current chairman James Arbuthnot MP for a Secretary of State for Defence who would command respect on all sides of the House.

Not paying Ministers may have all sorts of motives, but its consequence as a message to hard pressed armed forces may not be what was intended.