corruption Defined as a *quid pro quo* in which private gain is secured at public expense, corruption is a broad term, describing a range of activities. From bribery to win contracts, to electoral malpractice, to offering inducements to public servants, the term is necessarily capacious. It is similarly venerable. No less a figure than Moses' father-in-law urged that judicial selection should "look for men who are trustworthy and hate dishonest gain." (Exodus 18:21). The Sale of Office Act 1551 penalised "corruption in offices of justice or places of trust" and bribery itself has been a **common law** offence since at least the 18th century.

As a consequence of the expansion of the franchise and growth of the state, with the attendant expansion of opportunity structures, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw repeated attempts to criminalise corruption. In the electoral context, the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act 1883 penalised hitherto commonplace conduct such as treating and paying electors to display election materials. More important was the Act's imposition of local limits on the election expenditure of parliamentary candidates. This early instantiation of the principle of political equality proved to be one of the pillars of United Kingdom's party funding law in the 20th century, although it was not expanded to include national expenditure limits for political parties until the Political Parties Election and Referendum Act 2000.

Perhaps the most notorious example of political corruption in the United Kingdom – Maundy Gregory's expert selling of peerages at Lloyd George's behest – generated one of Parliament's more ineffectual statutes. The Honours (Prevention of Abuse) Act 1925, introduced as a direct response to Gregory's actions, makes the sale of honours illegal. The fact that only one person has ever been successfully prosecuted under the Act – Gregory himself in 1933 – is less a testament to the flawless character of British politics than the tortuous drafting of the Act. In mid-2007, after a 14-month police investigation, the **Crown Prosecution Service** announced that it would not bring charges under the 1925 Act against anyone involved in the "Cash For Peerages" affair which implicated the then **Prime Minister**'s chief fundraiser.

At the multinational level, the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery (1997) has proved to be a significant instrument, penalising for the first time supply-sided bribery. Signatories are required to put in place domestic legislation that criminalises bribery by their citizens of public officials from other countries, even if the events take place outwith the signatory's national boundaries. Further, the OECD itself has notable monitoring powers, which enable it to review domestic implementing legislation so as to assess its adequacy and also to assess the effectiveness with which the legislation is implemented. This process led to terse criticism of the British Government's decision in 2007 to discontinue the Serious Fraud Office's investigation concerning BAE Systems and the Al Yamamah defence contract with the government of Saudi Arabia, with the OECD expressing "serious concerns as to whether the decision was consistent with the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention." Whilst further instruments have been initiated at various regional levels, such as the Council of Europe's Corruption Conventions (1999), it can be anticipated that the United Nation's Convention Against Corruption (2003) will be a major focus of future legal attention.

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Further reading: M Pieth, LA Low and P Cullen (eds), *The OECD Convention On Bribery : A Commentary* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007)
C O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections*, 1868-1911 (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1962)