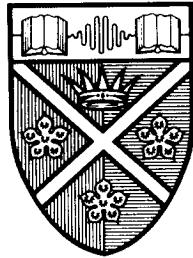


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THE POLITICAL VERSUS THE PERSONAL:

Participatory Democracy and Feminism

by

Jenny Chapman

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**THE POLITICAL VERSUS THE PERSONAL: PARTICIPATORY
DEMOCRACY AND FEMINISM***

By

**Jenny Chapman
(University of Strathclyde)**

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**Department of Government
University of Strathclyde
GLASGOW G1 1XQ
Scotland U.K.**

Introduction

This paper uses new data to examine the conflicts between political and personal commitments which arise when individuals seek to join political elites. It brings the two perspectives of participatory democracy and feminism to bear on the experience of individuals, and tries to answer two related questions of significance to both.

Contemporary interest in theories of participatory democracy in Western Europe can be traced to the events of 1968 and the subsequent upsurge of non-Marxist social movements which were critical of the hierarchical and elitist character of contemporary democracy and proposed participatory, non-hierarchical alternatives. Academic theorists of participatory democracy emerged, notable among them being Carole Pateman, who emphasised the educational and empowering effects of participation and the later Robert Dahl, who was concerned with problems of size and inequality in modern 'polyarchic' polities; both advocated the decentralization of decision-making to units practising genuine (as opposed to token) industrial democracy.¹ This was followed by the development of participatory democracy and the associated critiques of representative and party politics as a central theme of dissident political thought in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, with an emphasis on industrial democracy in some Solidarity groups in 1980-81,² as a component of the new socialism proposed in Russia by Boris Kagarlitsky³ and in the guise of the 'anti-politics'⁴ to which most Central European intellectuals subscribed till recently and to which Konrad Michnik and President Havel still cling nostalgically.

The perspectives of the participatory democrat and the radical feminist quite closely coincide, the principal differences being the highly-gendered conception of the citizen where most male political theorists are concerned and the far more total rejection of conventional structures on the part of many feminists.⁵ There is another kind of feminism, however, which may well subscribe to participatory democracy as a long-term goal but puts more emphasis on women's direct access to power here and now as a pre-requisite for change. The more competitive strategies advocated by many feminists, particularly in the United States, involve women in extending their career choices, adapting their priorities and behaviour to male values and recruitment patterns and competing for entry to elites in existing systems on the same terms as men. Their argument is persuasive; without power, women can only remain powerless and their goals will never be achieved.

It is the difficulties which both perspectives have encountered in the real world which have motivated this research. In West and East alike, participatory democracy remains a dream, even though some of its

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most passionate East European advocates are actually now 'in power'. Both Konrad in Hungary and President Havel in Czechoslovakia are adopting an increasingly negative view of 'the people' in consequence; it is their inadequacies which are the root of the problem. Yet can any of the dissident politicians who created the dream of 'new politics' really be said to be practising what they preach? None of them are 'ordinary' people; on the contrary their current political prominence is directly attributable to how extraordinarily prepared they have been to sacrifice their family life, their jobs and even their personal safety on account of politics. Nor do their political activities, past or present, remotely resemble those of the ordinary citizen in a participatory democracy; Havel may refuse to call himself a politician, but the fact is that he has spent the greater part of the last twelve years, like nearly all the dissidents, as consumed by politics as any politician in West or East could be. If politics and the citizen are judged by the yardstick of such men, then what has changed? Is it the people who fail the 'new politics' or the other way round?

The first question this research sets out to answer is whether a serious commitment to politics as we know it - centralised, hierarchical and competitive - is compatible even at the lowest public office level with a simultaneous commitment to other important areas of people's ordinary lives like their family and job. After all, such compatibility would seem to be the pre-requisite for a more participatory system in which 'the people' would be willing to participate. How different would politics have to be for such a system to be feasible?

The second question this paper seeks to answer is what price politics as we know it will exact of women who try to compete on the same terms as men. So far, we really know very little about the cost of politics to either sex. The only systematic comparison of male/female subjective experience and defensive strategies that I have seen (among National Convention Delegates in the United States)⁶ concentrated on the conflict of politics with family life and found that while men are at least as likely as women to experience a conflict of this kind, they refuse to modify their political careers on that account. Women, on the other hand will deliberately adopt a strategy of conflict avoidance, even if it is at the expense of their political ambitions. In fact, one of the few behavioural differences between male and female political activists seeking entry to elites that we really are sure about is that women tend to stand for office later in life than men and attribute this to conflict with their family role.

What we do not know is whether women are successful in avoiding conflict this way. If they are, then they will lose this advantage by

standing earlier in life to compete on equal terms with men. Indeed, the more women adapt their political behaviour patterns to those of men, the closer the price they pay will be to that which men incur - on top, of course, of whatever price they pay for being women, with responsibilities that are not shared by men. However, until we know what price it is that men incur - just what kind of conflict occurs with their family life and how painful it is, and what negative effects a commitment to politics may have on other important areas of their lives, such as their jobs - we can hardly judge how it will add to that which women have incurred already. The experience of both women and men has to be very much more systematically and intensively explored than hitherto before we can have any clear idea of the consequences of a more competitive approach on women's part.

The Study

The political context

The subjects of this study are people who have made the personal commitment to politics of standing as candidates for public office, but at the local level. The office they have sought, and in many cases won, is that of a District councillor in Strathclyde Region, the immensely varied region (combining Scotland's west-central industrial belt with parts of the South-West Highlands and the Inner Hebrides) in which nearly half the Scottish population lives. There are certain advantages in the political context this affords for a study of this kind.

In the first place, local politics is the obvious level to look for situations somewhat comparable to those in a future grassroots democracy. Councillors in Scotland, although they undoubtedly constitute a local political elite, normally still live and work in their communities, often in very ordinary jobs; they are citizens as much as politicians. They may enjoy local status and a degree of power in the (since Thatcher, increasingly limited) sphere of Scottish local government, but their level of remuneration is far too low for one to make an honest living out of local politics, or a dishonest one either.⁷

For the purposes of this study, these are fortunate circumstances, even if they distance it from political contexts (like the USA or the highly clientelistic cultures of southern Europe and the Middle East) where there is a lot of money to be made in local politics. The situation of these Scottish subjects is far closer to that of the participant citizen in a hypothetical participatory democracy than is that of a national or 'career' politician: their political commitments are an addition to and not a substitute for their ordinary working lives. The problems they encounter

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will be a good indication of the distance between politics as we know it and what would be compatible with continuous mass participation in politics.

From a feminist perspective there are also advantages. If it is generally recognised that women see a fundamental problem in the family responsibilities which are the core of women's gender role in all societies (and the source of their tendency to adopt a conflict avoidance strategy), it is equally recognised that incomes and careers are crucial to the social role and self-esteem of men. A study of the conflict between men's political commitments and their jobs will enable us to compare and contrast the experiences and behaviour of men and women in the area of most concern to each. It will also give us a better idea of what faces the increasing proportion of women who for various reasons are as committed to and/or dependent on their jobs as men, if they also seek entry to political elites.

The data

There are 19 District Councils in Strathclyde and in 1984 a total of 1189 men and women stood for the 419 council seats involved. No less than 1004 of these candidates responded to the Strathclyde District Election Survey of that year (hereinafter SDES), a postal survey which gathered extensive socio-economic, demographic, political and other background information on the candidates. This survey population was used in turn as the basis for the 'Citizen-Politician', a study of which the present paper is a part. This is a more intensive and qualitative investigation which explores in depth the borderline between the political elite and the ordinary population, examining the motivations and experiences of recruits for local public office, the roles which candidacy and office afford the politically active citizen and their rewards and costs.

The core data for this study comes from in-depth interviews with a one-in-five, systematic random sample of the original SDES survey population, augmented, however, in two respects. Because the proportion of women candidates in these elections is typically low (only 21.8 per cent in 1984), the women in the random sample were augmented by virtually the entire female candidate population from a single, large and representative district (a group of women whose socio-economic and other background attributes almost exactly mirrored those of the women in the random sample). The resulting sample (n=220, with 150 men and 70 women) is large enough to allow for systematic comparisons of the sexes as well as the other main demographic, socio-economic and partisan sub-groups. The comparison of winners and losers also allows us to investigate how directly the hierarchical distinctions which representative democracies entail, even within a

population composed of highly active elite aspirants, are related to the degree of conflict with ordinary life

The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the interview sample closely resembled those of the whole SDES population and are presented in Table 1 (see p. 26). The mean age of the sample was 42.8, but the men tended to be younger than the women (male mean age of 41.7 compared to 45.3 for women). Fewer than a fifth of the sample were single, with nearly threequarters married and the rest widowed, separated or divorced; the proportion of widows was somewhat greater, and that of married people slightly lesser, in the case of women than men. Three-quarters of the respondents (both sexes) were parents and 69.1 per cent (but men more likely than women) had children under 18 at the time of interview. Exactly two thirds of the sample were in employment at the time of the interview, with a further 8.7 per cent self-employed, 8.2 per cent unemployed and 7.8 per cent retired. Only 3.2 per cent were students or part-time employees and 5.9 per cent were housewives. Differences between men and women were along predictable lines; all the housewives and part-time employees were female, the proportion of retired women was greater than that of men (pensionable age comes five years earlier for women in the UK) and almost all the self-employed were male. The proportion of unemployed was the same for both sexes. The net result was that more men than women were employees. Occupational differences followed the same lines as the main SDES survey, with men more likely than women to have managerial or manufacturing industrial jobs, and women to be caring professionals (teachers, social workers etc.), or be employed in service sector jobs. Only slightly over a third of the sample had further education.

In terms of party affiliation, the largest sub-group (34.4 per cent) consisted of Labour candidates. Of the rest 23.9 per cent were Scottish Nationalists, 22.0 per cent Conservative, 15.1 per cent Liberal/SDP Alliance and the rest a mixture of Independents, Ecology and others. Just over a third of the candidates in the sample had won their seats.⁸ Nearly all the winners were incumbents and most of them were Labour.

The Interview

The bulk of the interviews were carried out by telephone⁹ between May 1985 and July 1986 and recorded as nearly as possible verbatim. They lasted on average about an hour and included a detailed investigation of the respondents' family background, original involvement in politics and route to candidacy as well their assessment of key areas of their subsequent experience, their political goals and the effect of intense

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political engagement on other aspects of their lives. (In addition, many respondents were telephoned back for clarification or further information.) The section of the enquiry which focused on political *versus* personal commitments was thus only a small part of the whole; two other studies using different areas of the data are already available.¹⁰

Most of the questions asked in the personal interview were open-ended; it was considered vital that the respondents should express themselves in their own words and at their own pace, to present a more complete, revealing and accurate account of their experience than could possibly be obtained by reducing it to standardised responses to a pre-conceived set of categories. The use of neutral prompts and a relaxed, supportive interviewing style encouraged candidates to expand on their accounts and the nuances this revealed were especially helpful in capturing the multi-dimensional character of individual experience. The telephone proved to be the ideal medium for this kind of interview; with a sympathetic but unseen listener, respondents were able to relive their experience more unselfconsciously and reflectively than is possible in a face-to face encounter. (Indeed, respondents sometimes seemed to forget they had an auditor at all.) As a result, each interview constitutes a complex whole, in which responses to specific questions can be tested against and illuminated by the information provided in other sections.

The present paper draws mainly, but not exclusively on the final section of the interview. This was initiated by the remark (modified as appropriate in the light of the information already supplied in the bulk of the interview), "Now it is clear that you have made a considerable/quite a/something of a personal commitment to politics" followed by the question "Would you say that this commitment to politics has come into conflict with your commitment to other important areas of your life, such as your family or your job, or any other important area of your life?"

This form of questioning had four advantages. In the first place, it did not assume that conflict had occurred; the respondent was to be the judge and his or her perceptions tapped. Secondly, it signalled the two areas of potential conflict which were considered crucial for this research while, thirdly, leaving it open to respondents to identify a further area or areas where conflict had occurred. Finally (and subsequent questioning was designed to make very sure if this was the case) it assumed the possibility of multiple conflicts e.g. with family and job.

In the case of a positive reply to the original question, the intention was to follow this up with a searching enquiry into the kinds and content of the conflict the respondent had experienced. In practice, most of the respondents who said they had experienced conflicts with their personal lives were anxious to explain themselves and launched without prompting

into a detailed explanation of their replies. In these cases, the interviewer's role was confined to requesting further explanation or clarification and, when a specific area of conflict was exhausted, returning to the full range of potential conflicts mentioned in the original question to enquire if other kinds of conflict had occurred. (e.g if family conflict has been described, "And what about your job? Has there been a conflict there?")

The data provided by respondents was remarkably rich in both quantitative and qualitative respects. On the one hand, it was possible not only to measure the incidence of conflict with, respectively, family, job and the single other area (their social life) which respondents identified as important and vulnerable but also to quantify the experience of conflict of *any* kind and the incidence of multiple conflict, i.e. with two or three areas of personal commitment. Breaking the sample down into its demographic and socio-economic components and taking election outcome and partisan identification into account as well, it was possible to test the hypotheses outlined above about the relationship of key variables with the experience of personal-political commitment conflict and to explore further the relationship of all these variables with conflicts of the different kinds and combinations.

At the same time, the respondents had provided a very detailed and personal account of their experience; using this descriptive material it was possible to compile a complete and sometimes dramatic canvas of the range of conflicts which arose and the considerable variation in personal experience. Drawing on the facts provided by respondents, the language they used to describe them and their own attempts to classify their experience it was also possible to measure, albeit somewhat impressionistically, the severity of the conflict each individual had experienced.

The *absence* of perceived conflict was revealing too, and not only in terms of its relationship with the background variables; many of those who said they had not experienced conflict with family and/or job also stated why they thought this was the case. While some attributed the lack of conflict to the attitudes and behaviour of other people or to other external causes, all of them interesting in themselves, some attributed it to actions of their own. On the basis of this and information collected in earlier sections of the interview a subgroup could be identified of people who, either at the time of the interview or in the past, had consciously employed a strategy of conflict avoidance by curtailing their political activities.

The Findings

The Incidence of Conflict

The basic finding of this study is that conflict between a commitment to politics and to other important areas of people's lives is the rule rather than the exception, experienced by no less than four out of every five candidates. (See Table 2). Three areas of personal, non-political commitment are involved and the most important of these, as anticipated, are the family, where conflict was experienced by over half the sample (53.6 per cent) and the individual's job, which affected roughly the same proportion (49.1 per cent). The third area of conflict, identified by the candidates themselves, was with their social life; this affected a much smaller, but by no means negligible proportion (22.7 per cent). Multiple conflicts were reported too. Although the proportion who experienced conflict in all three commitment areas is very small (only 8.6 per cent), fully a quarter (25.9 per cent) admitted to a dual conflict with both family and job.

In many cases these conflicts appeared to be acute. This was especially true where people's jobs were concerned (38.0 per cent) but over a quarter of respondents (26.8 per cent) had serious problems with their family life as well. As we shall see below, some of these problems were very severe indeed, by any standards.

Politics vs one's family life

The respondents were very specific in their descriptions of the kinds of conflict which arose between their political and family commitments. The unhappy picture which emerges from their accounts is one in which the burden of stress is most commonly perceived as falling on the marriage itself rather than the family as a whole. However, some of the most distressing experiences were associated with parenthood, either directly through the respondent's sacrifice of parenting to politics or indirectly through the total breakdown of the marriage.

Fifteen distinct items of conflict could be identified from the reports and these are shown in descending order of frequency in Table 3. By far the most common source of conflict was the loss of time that would otherwise have been spent with the respondent's spouse; this was cited in over a quarter of the cases, and usually with evident regret. Next came the loss of parenting or neglect of children's needs (14.5% of cases) a matter of deep regret, or even grief, to some people and at the very least a source of guilt and anxiety to everyone who mentioned it. Some older respondents felt in retrospect that they had played virtually no part in their children's lives because of politics, a loss which they now realised

could never be repaired. From their own accounts it was clear that several younger parents were in the process of laying up similar regrets.

Although it seemed to be a milder, more diffused sense of guilt which was expressed by those who ruefully admitted that 'politics is at their [the family's] expense' (13.7 per cent) it was precisely when this unfortunate fact encountered active resentment in the family that the most serious problems of all arose. For 6.8 per cent of the sample - i.e. for one in fifteen - the outcome had been nothing less than the total breakdown of the marriage, explicitly attributed by the respondents in question to their involvement in politics.

About the same proportion (all women, of course) referred to 'the general problem of being a woman with a family and job', including in two cases the special difficulties of single-parenthood. Almost as many cases (5.1 per cent) involved a clash of public and family interests, for example in connection with the sale of council houses. This was a policy introduced by the Conservative government in the face of furious opposition from Labour which put some Labour councillors in the unfortunate position of wishing very much, in the family interest, to buy their council houses, but being unable to do so for fear of the political consequences.

Among the less frequently-cited problems was the loss of common ground within the marriage as one spouse but not the other became engrossed in political concerns. In other cases, mercifully few, family members had been subjected to deliberate harrassment. A particular problem for some people was their inability, on account of political responsibilities, to plan ahead or take family holidays. Finally, a tiny proportion of cases involved the respondent in frequent absences from home, interfered with their caring for a sick, dependent relative, put a social strain on the respondent's spouse or caused guilt feelings over leaving the spouse to cope alone with family problems.

From this depressing list, it is clear that the range of politics versus family conflict is very wide, affecting different individuals in many different ways. The individual psychology of the respondents and the people around them is clearly a factor, since feelings of conflict were in some cases focused mainly or entirely on the respondent's internal sense of guilt or loss but in others reflected the attitudes and behaviour of other members of the family instead. However, broader and more systematic effects are clearly at work as well. The family situation, for example, is obviously a major factor constraining individual experience - relationships with children do not arise in the case of the childless or marital breakdown in the case of the single. The degree of political involvement is relevant too; accounts of the intrusion of politics into family life

revealed some problems, like telephone calls and doorstep visits from constituents, which are peculiar to Councillors.

Politics vs one's job

Almost as many people reported a conflict between politics and their commitment to their job as with family life. The sources of this conflict were equally varied as well (see Table 4) and may present considerable surprises to readers from different political cultures who are accustomed to associate public office with private gain.

The most common problem was simply that of finding time for both their jobs and politics, a problem which affected people in almost every line of work. It seems that whether meetings are held by day, in the evening or at weekends, someone's job will always suffer and for some people (such as working mothers, people trying to build careers and some of the self-employed) there is really no time which does not conflict. Not surprisingly, this problem of time is closely related to the next most frequently cited source of conflict, loss of income. Fully a fifth of the sample could quantify the costs of their political involvement in simple monetary terms and although in a few cases this stemmed from the refusal of members of the public to bring their business to people with whose politics they disagreed it was mainly due quite simply to the loss of earnings and business which accrues from working shorter hours and/or missing out on overtime rates while attending to political concerns. Associated with this goes the loss of promotion prospects, cited in almost exactly a fifth of the job conflict cases. Although there were those who said their employers consciously supported their activities either out of business interest or political sympathy, rather more respondents pointed out that few employers will promote someone whose enthusiasms lie outside the job, especially if this leads to requests for time off work or reluctance to work long hours.

Employers' resentment at the low return from an employee can make itself felt in many ways, one of which is the refusal of time off even, in extreme cases, for Councillors to attend to public business. Some respondents expressed considerable sympathy with their employers in this respect, accepting that they had grounds for resentment and that in some cases the employer simply could not afford to let an employee off; some felt guilty, too, about the strain on workmates of having to 'cover' for their absences. It was considerably worse, however, for the 10.4 per cent whose employers actively disliked their politics; being in the 'wrong party' and/or perceived as a 'trouble-maker' could be the source of much unpleasantness at work and have subtle and not so subtle effects on earnings and promotion prospects.

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The most severe penalty of all, of course, is the loss of one's job on account of politics, experienced in one form or another by no less than 14.1 per cent of the whole sample. In some cases this was not as bad as it seems; there were those who voluntarily gave up or changed their job deliberately to allow more time for politics. Most had no choice in the matter, however. When an employer is faced with the need for redundancies, the political activists or Councillors are often, it seems, among the first to go, either because they are not pulling their weight as employees or because this is the golden opportunity to get rid of someone whose political activities are not appreciated. Although in some cases subsequent employment of some kind had been found, a hard core, made up mainly of Councillors living in areas of high unemployment, were afraid they had joined the long-term unemployed. 'No one in his senses', as one man put it, 'is going to take a Councillor on the payroll in times like these.'

Although it seemed that no job was immune from conflict with politics some respondents felt that their situation was peculiarly difficult because of the nature of their employment. These included shift-workers, the self-employed and people whose jobs took them away from home a lot. There was also a small category of people whose jobs rendered them ineligible for certain kinds of public office. No one employed by a Scottish local authority is eligible for simultaneous Council office in the authority in question so that, for example, teachers, social workers and other employees of a Region cannot stand for a seat in the Regional Council even if, ironically, it is education or social work policy which is their main political concern. If they wish office it must be at District level (where the functions are quite different) or else in another Region. The controversial two-tier system of Scottish local government was also implicated in several of the clashes of public and private interests reported here, in which some candidates found themselves publicly committed by their party policy to the abolition of the very agency (usually the Region) which employed them.

Given the range of conflicts these local politicians have experienced, and the severity of some, it seems surprising that only 2.8 per cent of these respondents said their health was not standing up to the strain.

Politics and Social Life

The third area of conflict is with the individual's social life, a problem which had not occurred to this researcher as likely to loom large but was identified by 22.7 per cent of the sample as an important conflict in their lives. The picture was straightforward compared to family and job conflict

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(see Table 5) but yet again, time was the major problem, with nearly three-quarters of those affected saying they no longer had time for a social life and several that they had lost touch as a result with former friends. Some people also felt that success in local politics had turned them into standing targets for their constituents; as well as suffering the frequent telephone calls which may undermine family life, they could not appear in public places without being 'pestered' with individual grievances, drawn into political arguments, etc. In every case, the result seemed to be a growing sense of isolation from ordinary life, a common thread which in fact ran through all the areas of conflict - with family, job or social life - which respondents described.

Patterns of Conflict

It might seem that with so high an incidence of conflict there would be little room for variation in the kinds of people who experience it but in practice distinct patterns came to light when sub-group comparisons were made. The most striking and consistent, affecting every area and combination of areas, was the difference¹¹ between winners and losers. These winners were of course councillors at the time of interview, and since most of them had been incumbents too (and nearly all incumbents won their seats), they pretty well exactly accounted for the office-holding experience in the sample. We have already seen that some of the sources of commitment conflict cited by respondents in this study are not available to non-office-holders. As Table 6 shows, more than 90 per cent of winners experienced conflict in some important area of their lives compared to 72.9 per cent of losers, and the difference between winners and losers was consistently great in every area - 25.6 per cent in the case of social life, 20.6 per cent where the family were concerned and 17.1 with respect to their jobs. Clearly, the closer people get to power the further they get from the needs and satisfactions of everyday life.

Among the other patterns which emerged, some were clearly linked with this. Thus Labour and Independent candidates, who had by far the highest success rates in these elections, also had the highest conflict rates, especially marked in the case of family but where Labour were concerned, with job as well. The fact that Labour had by far the highest proportion of industrial workers and the less-educated among their candidates and selected them for winning seats may also have something to do with this, however; such people are not likely to enjoy much flexibility in their jobs (and their politics may also be anathema to private employers). It was in line with this that less-educated people reported high levels of conflict with their jobs, though not with family.¹²

Another striking pattern to emerge related to the respondent's

family situation in the two senses of marital status and the presence of children in the family.¹³ These, however, were notably less consistent in their effects across the board than the degree of progress people had made in the political hierarchy. In the case of marital status, the important distinction was between the single and the married, but the burden of conflict fell in very different ways in the different areas of family, job and social life. Where the family was concerned, only a quarter of the single, but well over a half of the married, widowed and divorced or separated had problems to report; in fact the difference was even greater than in the case of parents compared with non-parents (of whom 60 per cent and 33.5 per cent respectively reported a conflict). On the job dimension, however, neither component of family situation made much difference. In social life, differences were very marked, with a high level of conflict reported by the single, widowed and divorced or separated compared with married people, and by parents compared with non-parents - a clear indication that wherever an individual's priorities lie, there the greatest conflict will occur. Presumably married people and parents are used to having their basic social needs met by their family ties or else are too preoccupied by the conflict between politics and family to notice the absence of a social life!

It was particularly important, given the objects of this enquiry, to identify male-female differences in the data. In fact, the gender pattern is at first sight quite pronounced and is consistent with the expectation that women will deliberately avoid conflict while men will not. A considerably higher proportion of men - 83.3 per cent - had experienced conflict of one kind or another, whereas the corresponding figure for women was only 70.0 per cent. (See Table 7) Furthermore, the proportion of men (32.6 per cent) who reported conflicts on both the key dimensions of family and job was nearly three times that of women. Of those who reported experiencing all three kinds of conflict, almost all were men.

When the dimensions of this conflict are more closely examined, however, the pattern appears to disintegrate. It is not, after all, in the area of the *family* that the heavier burden of conflict falls on men, as would be expected; on the contrary, the proportions of each sex whose political commitment has conflicted with their family life are almost exactly the same. The overall difference is entirely accounted for by the far greater conflict *with their jobs* experienced by men (58 per cent compared with only 30 per cent of women).

What lies behind this unexpected pattern? Is sex an important predictor of conflict experience or not? Clearly, a more rigorous, multivariate form of analysis will be required to measure the effect of sex

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when controlling for the other variables. However, before proceeding to this analysis, which constitutes the final section of the paper, some important issues remain to be explored. It has not been established yet if the women in this sample ever *have* employed a strategy of conflict avoidance, and it remains to be seen whether we can identify any strategies employed by men. It is also essential, given the highly gendered roles of men and women in the family and workplace, to see if the experience of conflict we are discussing is really the same for both sexes, either in its sources or severity. The next two sections focus on male/female accounts of how political commitments have come in conflict with their family and jobs respectively. In each case, special attention is given to the use of deliberate conflict avoidance strategies and the qualitative differences between the experience reported by each sex is thoroughly explored.

Politics vs the Family: men and women compared

Could the unexpectedly similar levels of family conflict for men and women described above reflect an idiosyncracy of the population studied, in that Scottish women political activists in general, or this particular sample, are unusually disinclined to take avoiding action on their families' account? The short answer is no. Evidence of deliberate conflict avoidance was collected in three different parts of the interview; in the section dealing with the events leading up to the respondent's first candidacy, in a later section where candidates discussed their personal goals and finally in the conflict context. These three sources corroborated each other very well and the findings conformed closely to the expected gender pattern. Approximately a fifth of the whole sample had definitely curtailed their political activity, either now or in the past, on account of their family commitment, but the proportion of women (31.4 per cent) was more than twice as great as that of men (14.7 per cent). The women were also very much more likely than men to report having practised an avoidance strategy *in the past*. In fact, nearly one in ten of the women (but scarcely any men) specifically stated that they had made a conscious decision not to stand for office at some time in the past because of family responsibilities. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that the female candidates were not only slightly older than the male on average, but had embarked on candidacy later; the average age at which the men had first stood for office was thirty-seven years old, compared with an average for women of forty-one.¹⁴

Why, then, were these women still experiencing conflict with their family commitments just as frequently as men? A large part of the reason appears to be the female gender role which drove them to adopt an

avoidance strategy in the first place. As far as the respondents themselves are concerned, the problem is quite simply that they *are* women, with a commitment to the family so great that conflict with other commitments is almost unavoidable. What women believe they are doing by curtailing or postponing their political commitment is not avoiding the conflict *per se* so much as modifying and mitigating it. What is more, the different experience of men and women strongly support this view.

When the sources of family conflict described by the sexes are compared (see Table 7), marked differences are found firstly in the range and ordering of items and secondly in the severity of the experience. It was noticeable that for most of the women the conflict between family and politics *for a woman* seemed self-explanatory. When it came to elaborating, the most frequent explanation was simply the general problem of 'being a woman, with a family and job'. Other aspects of the problem such as politics being 'at their [the family's] expense', loss of parenting and the intrusion of politics into family life were also cited but only by a few.

The men presented a very different picture, characterised by much greater detail and variety. Loss of time with spouse in particular but also loss of parenting and the intrusion of politics into family life bulked very large indeed, followed by the admission that politics is 'at their expense' and considerable evidence of family resentment thereof. Indeed, *every single case* of total breakdown of the marriage was reported by a man. All in all, men were more than twice as likely as women to describe a conflict that could be categorised objectively (and was clearly experienced subjectively) as severe.

Politics vs Job: men and women compared

If gender is so important in the area of family commitment, what then about men and the jobs which are so central to their social role? We have already seen how far more men than women reported conflict between politics and their jobs. For the majority of both sexes this conflict was experienced as severe, which means that nearly half of the men in the sample (but only just over a fifth of the women) had experienced acute problems with their jobs.

As in the case of family conflict, the range of problems besetting men was far greater even though, as Table 8 shows, the biggest problem for both sexes is the same; finding time for both. This problem looms much larger for women, however, and again, given women's primary responsibility for the family, it could hardly be otherwise. Where the sexes diverge most sharply, however, is in the emphasis men put on their loss of earnings and promotion prospects, problems affecting about a

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quarter of the men in each case, but scarcely mentioned by the women. One reason for this, yet again, was the sexes' different roles and expectations. Many of the women not only set a greater psychological value on their husbands' breadwinning contribution but in any case had relatively low-paid, sex-segregated jobs with little income and few promotion prospects to lose. Another reason, paradoxically, was the more protected work environment enjoyed by salaried, white-collar women such as teachers and clerical workers, with shorter more regular hours and fewer career prospects. By contrast, workingmen's wages often depend on overtime and professional or business careers on their commitment to long, irregular hours, both in sharp conflict with the demands of a political career.

It might seem strange, then, that it is women who were more likely to report the most serious conflict of all, involving the loss of their job. To put this in perspective, however, we need to understand how this event occurred and was perceived by the individual involved. The loss of his job was usually seen as calamitous by a man, likely to result in severe and often prolonged loss of income for the family as a whole and irreparable damage to his own career. With women, however, there was a voluntary element in every case. Four out of five were Councillors and these women were merely moving from one service sector job to another, less demanding one, moving down from full-time to part-time employment and/or to a more suitable location, or else giving up paid work altogether to concentrate on politics. The principal object was to render what they regarded as the primary conflict, between family and politics, more manageable and although these women all regretted their original jobs, they were also cushioned by their husbands' earnings (or a widow's pension) and could afford to give them up. In fact, their job loss was really an example of a conflict avoidance strategy. As one Labour Councillor put it, 'It's very hard to have a job with any kind of commitment plus politics and a family; it's the time and the mental effort. It's not conflicting so much now [after cutting down her job] - if you're doing three you can't cope; cut out one and you can manage.'

What then of the men? As we have seen, men's actual experience of conflict with family commitments is extensive and severe, yet they are much less likely than women to adopt an avoidance strategy on this account. It looks as if men's original expectations of family life are so low that they scarcely consider it when making their choices; they have to find out the hard way about their own psychological needs and the reactions of their wives and children. Where men's jobs are concerned, however, their material and psychological expectations are high and their performance as breadwinners is generally regarded as the most

important measure of success in life. Do men, then, take avoiding action too, in respect of the area which is of greater moment to them? The answer is that to some extent they do. Almost exactly a quarter of the men in this sample (compared with 16.2 per cent of women) reported having curtailed their political activities for the sake of their jobs and in fact, when the use of an avoidance strategy *per se* is considered (irrespective of whether on account of family or job), the overall difference between the sexes is quite small.¹⁵

Why, then, are men still experiencing conflict significantly more often and more severely than women? Part of the answer is that women's strategy is more drastic than that of men, whichever way it goes; women postpone candidacy altogether or give up their jobs voluntarily while some men merely limit the level of their political activities (e.g. to a local rather than a parliamentary candidacy, or by cutting out trade union office and confining themselves to local government and party work, or *vice versa*) while others wait until the conflict, in family or job, has reached crisis point before they act at all. There is also, of course, that core group of men who are experiencing acute conflict on every front and will not give in whatever the cost to themselves and others. Ambition may be one reason, obsession with politics another but there are also men who simply 'can't say no'. Take, for example, the young man whose hopes were set on a trade union career but gave in to pressure from his party and union colleagues to fill a safe vacant Council seat. The first casualty was his union office, given up for lack of time, the next was his job, on the crest of a redundancies wave, which meant he even lost his union membership. It was only when his marriage broke up too, taking his children with it and leaving him with nothing but a public office he had not really sought, that this man seriously began to consider curtailing his politics instead of everything else that he valued in life. Of course, one may ask where we would be without heroic men who will stand up for up for their beliefs - and there are a few men in this sample whose self-sacrifice commands respect. However, what one might call the 'William Tell syndrome' in Scottish local politics more often seems to serve no noble cause at all.

Predicting conflict: a multivariate analysis

There seem to be several explanations for the variation that occurs in the incidence of conflict between political and personal commitments, with male and female gender being by no means the most consistent. Of course, strong *prima facie* bivariate relationships may be misleading. They may be spurious, reflecting the separate influence of another variable on both the incidence of conflict and the seeming independent

variable, or the latter may be an intervening variable which depends on a prior independent variable for its effect. In this instance complicating relationships between the various independent variables are already known to exist. Although the best 'predictors' of the variation may be surmised from an intimate knowledge of the data, they cannot be verified from crosstabulations without an impossibly elaborate system of controls; a more rigorous and/or convenient method is required.

The method used here is multiple regression analysis, which provides a summary measure of the relationship between two variables while simultaneously controlling (or more precisely adjusting) for all the other independent variables which are entered into a regression equation.¹⁶ Two sets of equations were calculated. In the first, the dependent variable was the incidence of conflict *per se*, firstly overall, then separately with family, job and social life and finally with *both* family and job and with all three. Then a second set was calculated with *severe* conflict, family and job, as the dependent variable. The independent variables in all these equations included winner/loser, level of education, marital status (single/other), parent and sex.¹⁷ Almost as an afterthought, it was decided also to include an avoidance strategy variable as well. This was 'Agefirst', a variable identifying the candidates who were aged less than forty when they first stood and enabling us to evaluate the effectiveness of deferring one's bid for office - the strategy preferred by women.

The consistency of the results across the first set of equations was quite remarkable. In every case, a statistically significant equation was produced in which around 11 per cent of the variance (adjusted r^2) was explained and two variables - office-holding and age at first candidacy - emerged as outstanding 'predictors' of commitment conflict of almost every kind and combination.

Taking sex, level of education, marital status, parenthood and age at first candidacy into account, winners were 19 per cent more likely than losers to experience conflict of any kind and 20 per cent more likely to perceive conflict with either their family or job.¹⁸ They were also 23 per cent more likely to have problems with *both* family or job and almost 17 per cent more likely to experience conflict in all three important areas. Looking at the theatres of conflict separately, they were 19 per cent more likely to experience conflict with their family life, 22 per cent with job and 29 per cent with social life.

These substantial negative effects were equalled, however, and in some cases surpassed by those of seeking office sooner rather than later; the only area where this was not a significant factor was that of social life. People of either sex, with or without further education spouses and

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children and irrespective of whether they had won the office that they sought or not, were 18 per cent more likely to experience conflict of some kind, 21 per cent to experience it with family or job, 14 per cent with both of them and 7 per cent with all three, if they had stood before they reached the age of forty. Not only are women right about how to keep conflict with the family in bounds, but the strategy they adopt is also the best way of avoiding conflict with one's job as well - even more effective than failing to win a seat. The effects of sex itself are dwarfed by this; all that is left is the fact that men are still 5 per cent more likely than women to have conflict with a) their jobs and b) with family and job.

Apart from these consistent major predictors, the largest effects were those of marital status in the case of conflict with the family, and parenthood in that of social life. Single people, unsurprisingly, were 27 per cent less likely to report conflict with their family life, while parents were 24 per cent less likely to be aware of conflict with their social life. The only other reliable predictor was lack of further education; the less educated were 11 per cent more likely to experience conflict with one or other of family or job.

In the final pair of equations interest is centred on the question of severe conflict, with family and job, where the comparison of male-female experience suggests that both sex and strategies will have significant effects; the problem is to disentangle them. What the regression results show, yet again, is the overwhelming importance of the timing of a political career and the way that this effects both sexes equally even if they are not equally disposed to take account of it. The most important 'predictor' of severe conflict with the family is the presence of children in the family (with parents 18 per cent more likely to experience severe conflict) but next to this comes the respondent's age when he or she first stood, with those who stood earlier 13 per cent more likely to run into acute problems. Although there is a residual effect of sex, it is only in the order of 4 per cent (i.e., men that much more likely to encounter serious problems). In the case of severe problems with one's job, the effect of sex almost entirely disappears when strategy is taken in to account; it is true that sex is the prior, independent variable but the effect of strategy on experience is incomparably greater than that of sex on strategy. Women are more likely to postpone their bid for office than are men, but people who stand earlier, irrespective of their sex, are 19 per cent more likely than late starters to have serious difficulty with their jobs. The only other statistically significant predictor is office-holding, with the successful 15 per cent more likely to have serious job conflict.

Conclusions

As this analysis has shown, almost everyone who becomes involved in politics deeply enough to stand for public office will find that it conflicts with the most important areas of personal life, such as one's family and job and even social life. In fact, the rule seems to be that whatever the individual is committed to, politics will conflict with it and the more important the commitment, the more likely the conflict is. The relationship works the other way, too; the greater the commitment to politics and the nearer that one gets to power, even at the local level studied here, the greater the personal cost will be; public winners are private losers. Unfortunately, the costs are borne not only by the individual concerned but by his or her family and friends as well. This is particularly true for the families of men, since the severity of the conflict experienced with both family and job is greater in the case of males. The only effective way of avoiding or mitigating such conflict is to postpone seeking office until the most demanding years of family life, financial responsibility and career establishment are past. This is the strategy women adopt to deal with conflict with their family role, but which proves extremely effective in the case of *either* sex, irrespective of the level of political success and in respect of job even more than family. In fact the effects of sex on experience are those of strategy.

These findings have important implications for theories of participatory democracy and for feminist strategy as well. Democracy as we know it - centralised, competitive and hierarchical- is simply not compatible with an ordinary family and working life, or even with a normal social life. We can hardly wonder that so few people in western systems participate in party politics and that those who do are often seen as particularly egoistical and conflict-oriented. Unfortunately, this means that our whole conception of politics and the way that people practice it would have to be altered very radically before more people would be prepared to get involved. What is more, since mass involvement in decision-making is what participatory democracy is all about and public apathy is the obstacle at which it usually falls, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that such systems will never work unless the change in politics *comes first*.

For feminists urging women to advance into political elites on the same terms as men, these findings also ought to give food for thought. The experience of men is not a pretty one and yet that is what will face them if they try to compete on the same terms as men. Not that women ever *can* compete on the same terms so long as the sexes live by different gender roles. Women in every western society still have the primary responsibility for childcare and the family, which means that if they stop

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postponing office they will be juggling *three* peakload responsibilities at once, not two like men. What is more, seeking public office sooner will not increase the *proportion* of women candidates, but merely alter their timetable. Given the existing socio-economic foundation of political recruitment,¹⁹ women will have to extend their range of jobs and alter their career patterns drastically (as many liberal feminists are urging them to do) in order to provide a larger pool of possible recruits. This will mean an even greater strain on their time and energy (and that is without even considering the implications of the rise in women's single-parenthood). Women are already unenthusiastic about participating in what might be described as the 'William Tell' syndrome in local Scottish politics, in which heroic sacrifice is made of *other* people's interests; can they really be expected to take on that of Superwoman as well?

NOTES

1. Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970); Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (New Haven, Yale University Press 1982)
2. See Alain Touraine et al, *Solidarity; the analysis of a social movement, Poland 1980-81* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983)
3. Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Dialectic of Change* (London, Verso, 1980)
4. The phrase used by Georg Konrad for the title of his influential *Antipolitics: an essay* (London, Quartet Books, 1984)
5. As in Kathy Ferguson *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (London, Virago, 198)
6. Virginia Sapiro "Private Costs of Public Commitments or Public Costs of Private Commitments? Family Roles versus Political Ambition", *American Journal of Political Science*, 26, 2, 1982.
7. When councillors are caught out in corruption or fraud, as they periodically are, the sums involved are usually remarkably small. The low remuneration reflects both an older tradition in Scottish local government that it is the 'haves' who ought to run the show and a general contemporary desire to see that no one should seek office for the 'wrong' (i.e. mercenary) reasons or have a good time at the public expense.
8. Although the proportion of female winners in the actual elections (and in the original SDES population) was lower than that of men, the proportion of male and female winners was the same in the interview sample, a sampling distortion which had its positive side since it made comparison of male and female winners feasible.
9. By myself or my assistant Alison Dunn.
10. See Jenny Chapman 1) "Adult Socialization and Out-Group Politicization; an Empirical Study of Consciousness-raising", *British Journal of Political Science*, vol 7, no 3, 1987 (which used

the female samples only) and 2) "Political Participation and Personal Experience: What Candidates Get Out of Campaigning". Paper presented at the ESRC Conference on Political Participation, Manchester, January 1990.

11. This difference was significant in the statistical as well as the substantive sense. Unless otherwise stated, all the results reported in this section were significant at the 0.05 level at the very least.
12. Considerable variation was also found in respect of employment status, with part-time workers, housewives and the self-employed less likely to report conflict of any kind than the employed or retired. However, this variable was muddled by the fact that certain kinds of employment status, such as being unemployed, working part-time or being a housewife were known to be *effects* of job conflict (in fact the highest levels of conflict of all were reported by the unemployed) and is not regarded in the subsequent analysis.
13. Neither the age of the children at the time of interview nor the age of the respondents themselves showed sufficient variation with respect to conflict to be worth discussing here.
14. The standard deviation from the mean was 10 years in both sexes.
15. Men 34 per cent, women 40 per cent
16. That is, the method used was 'Enter', a more or less arbitrary choice in fact, since the other methods available in SPSSX produced virtually identical regression coefficients for the statistically significant independent variables.
17. This was after extensive experiments with other variables including party (Labour/ other) and age at the time of interview which proved insignificant in their effects.
18. The reader should note that the regression technique can be used only with interval level and/or 'dummy' variables. Because all the variables used here were 'dummies' (in which the only scores are one or zero) it is not necessary to report these results in the form of the standardised regression coefficients (betas); the unstandardised regression coefficient (the Bs) can be used instead.

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The latter have the inestimable advantage of being translatable into percentage terms, which are much easier for lay readers to understand. Thus the statement that winners were 19 per cent more likely to experience any kind of conflict is simply a more generally intelligible way of saying that the unstandardised regression coefficient for the variable 'winner' was 0.19.

19. The socio-economic basis of recruitment in this particular sample and its implications for women, already have been analysed. See my paper "Patterns of Political Recruitment among Men and their Implications for Women" presented to the International Society for Political Psychology, New Jersey, 1988 and Jenny Chapman, *Politics, Feminism and the Reformation of Gender* (London, Routledge, forthcoming 1992), chapter 2.

Table 1: Demographic, socio-economic and electoral characteristics of the sample

	Whole Sample	(Men)	(Women)
	%	%	%
	100.0	68.2	31.8
Mean age (years)	42.8	41.7	45.3
Marital status:			
Single	17.7	17.3	18.6
Div/sep	4.1	4.0	4.3
Widowed	5.5	2.7	11.4
Married	72.7	76.0	65.7
Parent	75.3	74.5	77.1
Children under 18	69.1	73.9	59.3
Employment Status			
Employed	66.2	71.8	54.3
Unemployed	8.2	8.7	7.1
Retired	7.8	6.0	11.4
Housewife	5.9	0.7	17.1
Self-employed	8.7	1.4	12.1
Student	0.9	0.9	1.4
Part-time	2.3	-	7.1
Further Education	36.4	28.2	54.4
Party Affiliation			
Conservative	21.8	18.0	30.0
Labour	34.5	37.3	28.6
Lib/SDP	15.0	14.7	15.7
SNP	24.1	26.0	20.0
Independent/ Other	4.6	4.0	5.8
Won election	34.5	33.3	37.1

Table 2: Conflict between Political and Personal Commitments

Area of Conflict	%
Any Conflict (with Family, Job or Social Life)	79.1
Conflict with Family or Job	76.8
Conflict with Family	53.6
Conflict with Job	49.1
Conflict with Social Life	22.7
Conflict with Family <i>and</i> Job	25.9
Conflict with Family, Job <i>and</i> Social Life	8.6

Table 3: Sources of Conflict between Politics and Family Commitment, in descending order of frequency.

Conflict Item	%
Loss of time with spouse	26.5
Loss of parenting	14.5
Constant intrusion of politics into family life (includes family constantly having to answer the telephone for political calls)	13.7
"Politics is at their expense"	12.3
Resentment in the family	8.5
Complete breakdown of marriage	6.8
The 'general problem of being a woman with a family and job' (including single-parenthood)	6.2
Clash of public and private interests	5.1
Loss of common ground with spouse	3.4
Harrassment of family	2.6
Inability to make firm plans, have family holidays	2.6

Also cited: frequent absences from home, lack of care for sick, dependent relative, the social strain on the respondent's spouse and the problem of leaving the spouse to cope alone.

Table 4: Sources of Conflict between Political and Job Commitment, in descending order of frequency

Source of Conflict	%
Finding time for both	31.1
Loss of earnings/business	20.7
Loss of promotion prospects	19.0
Employer resentment (includes time off refused)	16.9
Actual loss of job	14.1
Being in the 'wrong party' <i>vis a vis</i> employer	10.4
Clash of public/private interests	9.4
Strain on/hostility of workmates	7.6
Being on Shift-work	4.7
Ineligibility for public office due to job	4.7
Unable to get another job	3.8
Health can't cope	2.8
Special problems of the self-employed	2.8
Job involves being away a lot	0.9

Table 5: Sources of Conflict between Politics and Social Life, in descending order of frequency

Source of Conflict	%
No time for social life	70.0
Lost touch with friends	22.0
Pestered in public places	10.0
Become cynical	4.0
Lost interest in it	4.0
Dislike of new associates	2.0

Table 6: Incidence of Conflict between Political and Personal Commitments, Winners and Losers

Area of Conflict	Winners %	Losers %	Difference %
Any Conflict (with Family, Job or Social Life)	90.8	72.9	17.9
Conflict with Family or Job	88.2	70.8	17.4
Conflict with Family	67.1	46.5	20.6
Conflict with Job	60.5	43.1	17.4
Conflict with Social Life	39.5	13.9	25.6
Conflict with Family <i>and</i> Job	32.0	12.9	19.1
Conflict with Family, Job <i>and</i> Social Life	11.3	2.9	8.4

Table 7: Conflict between Political and Personal Commitments, by Sex

Area of Conflict	Men %	Women %
Any Conflict (with Family, Job or Social Life)	83.3	70.0
Conflict with Family or Job	81.3	67.1
Conflict with Family	55.3	50.0*
Conflict with Job	58.0	30.0
Conflict with Social Life	24.0	20.0*
Conflict with Family <i>and</i> Job	32.0	12.9
Conflict with Family, Job <i>and</i> Social Life	11.3	2.9

* Difference between men and women not statistically significant

Table 8: Conflict of Politics with Family , the Sexes Compared

a) Men	Nature of conflict	%	b) Women	Nature of conflict	%
Loss of time with spouse	36.6		Problem of 'being a woman with a family and job'		20.0
Loss of parenting	18.3				
Intrusion into family life	17.1				
"Politics is at their expense"	13.4				
Resentment in family	11.0				
Total breakdown of marriage	9.8		Politics is at their expense		8.6
Clash of public/private interests	6.1		Loss of parenting		5.7
Harrassment of family	3.7		Intrusion into family life		5.7
Loss of common ground with spouse	3.7		No holidays/can't plan		2.9
No holidays/can't plan	2.9		Resentment in Family		2.9
			Sick dependent relative		2.9
			Loss of time with spouse		2.9
			Clash of public/private interests		2.9
			Lost common ground with spouse		2.9

Table 9: Sources of Conflict of Politics and Job, the sexes compared

a) Men	Nature of Conflict	%	b) Women	Nature of Conflict	%
Finding time for both		29.4	Finding time for both		38.1
Loss of earnings/business		24.5	Actual loss/renunciation of job		23.8
Loss of promotion prospects		22.6	Strain on workmates		19.0
Employer resents/time-off refused		18.7	Employer resents/time-off refused		9.5
Actual loss/renunciation of job	11.8		In the 'wrong' party for employer		9.5
In the 'wrong party' for employer		10.6	Clash of public/private interests		9.5
Clash of public/private interests		9.4	Ineligibility		9.5
Being on shift work		5.9	Loss of business		4.8
Strain on workmates		4.8			
Cannot get another job		4.7			
Health can't cope/worse for self-employed/ineligibility		3.5			

Table 10: Proportion who have curtailed political activities because of Family or Job commitments or either, by sex

	Whole Sample %	Men %	Women %
Respondent has curtailed political activities because of			
a) Family commitment			
at any time	20.0	14.7	31.4
in the past	11.4	6.7	21.4
b) Job commitment			
at any time	21.8	24.7	15.7
in the past	11.4	14.7	4.3
c) either Family or Job commitment			
now or in the past	35.9	34.0	40.0*
in the past	20.9	19.3	24.3*

* Difference between men and women not statistically significant