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**A CONSTITUENCY M.P. AND HIS LOCAL COMMUNITY:
A CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about the working relationships Members of Parliament form with local elected and permanent officials in their constituencies. This is a case study of one constituency based on interviews of a sample of district and country councillors, local officers, party agents and activists as well as the Member himself. Several observations are made in this study. First, lines of cooperation in this constituency were much more partisan than is typically found in the United States. Second, the Member must apparently maintain a careful balance between fostering good relations with local bureaucrats in order to obtain their cooperation and being their critic in order to claim credit. Lastly, an increase in the constituency orientation of one candidate seems to lead to an increase in the constituency orientation of the other. Candidates can apparently be locked into a high level of constituency service by the expectations they build up among constituents.

family and neighbors. Many M.P.s have accepted the responsibility of dealing with these demands. A recent survey of M.P.s and their agents for instance revealed that 55 percent of them thought that it was their responsibility to deal with local cases while 45 percent said that it was not (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1980).

One dimension of this trend which has so far been unexplored is the reaction of the local community to the greater constituency involvement of the M.P. By taking up local complaints and by leading campaigns against unpopular local government decisions, the M.P. must regularly deal with both elected and permanent local officials. This raises various questions about how the M.P. works with councillors and officers to handle local grievances and about what they in turn think of the Member's immersion in the constituency affairs.

In an attempt to assess what happens when an M.P. becomes active in his or her constituency, we have made a study of one case where both the newly elected and recently defeated M.P.s devoted a great deal of effort to constituency affairs. We interviewed a sample of the district and county councillors, local officers, party agents and activists as well as the two M.P.s themselves. We asked the same questions to all interviewees, but we also encouraged them to provide any further information they thought relevant. The issues we address using this material are first, how did the former Labour member get heavily involved in his constituency's affairs; secondly, what sort of interactions did he have with the councillors and permanent local officials; thirdly, how did these officials react to

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Relations between M.P.s and their constituency parties have been called "the secret garden of British politics." (Ranney, 1965). The same could be said of relations between M.P.s and their constituencies generally. One important aspect of this relationship is the handling of citizen complaints. There is growing evidence that M.P.s devote a significant amount of their scarce time and meager staff resources to ombudsman-like activities on behalf of their constituents (Dowse, 1963; Barker and Rush, 1970; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1980). The volume of constituent complaints is often large, exceeding in some instances 100 cases per week. Traditionally, Members have intervened into disputes between citizens and the bureaucracy over such matters as immigration status, taxation, social services, pensions or the military because their access to ministers could pressure the bureaucracy into changing its policies and procedures. By contrast, local authority issues have not always been considered the Member's responsibility. Increasingly, however, M.P.s have been asked to deal with local authority complaints. These include housing especially, but also such diverse problems as education, planning decisions, environmental issues, and disputes between

his locally-oriented constituency style; and lastly, what effect did the Labour member's strategy have on the Conservative candidate's behavior both during and after the campaign? Since this is a case study of one constituency only, the implications of our findings for behavior across all constituencies are necessarily tentative.

THE STRATEGY OF LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

When the new Labour M.P. won a close election in 1974, he sought to establish himself in the constituency by taking a keener interest in its affairs than had previous Members. He did this in several ways. To begin with, he tried to be seen in the constituency as much as possible by attending numerous garden fetes, bazaars and social events. Frequent contact with his constituents, he had hoped, would convey concern for them individually and for the constituency generally. He also made a habit of attending a number of constituency party functions and GMC meetings since he thought these appearances might be useful for building up the morale of the local party and for fostering good relations with party activists.

The Labour Member also undertook a very active advocacy of constituency interests in Parliament. Several of those interviewed for instance mentioned his campaign to defend a local hospital against closure, and it was evident from their remarks that he had earned a great deal of credit in their eyes for his efforts. Of course, the Members' formal powers in such matters are extremely limited. Unlike their American counterparts, M.P.s cannot

use a key position on a committee to block the government's action and must rely on their ability to focus publicity on the issue and to lobby ministers in Parliament.

The third, and most controversial, aspect of the Labour M.P.'s strategy was his heavy involvement in local casework. The Labour Member claimed to receive 10,000 letters and between 4,000 and 5,000 cases per year. Of these, the largest number were housing cases. Some cases were referred to the district councillors, but the M.P. dealt with most personally. As a consequence, he had become, in his words, "grossly involved in constituency affairs." When Parliament was in session, he was spending two to three hours every morning and most of the weekends on surgeries, mail, personal appearances and meetings. Instead of holding surgeries in fixed locations once or twice a month, as do most M.P.s, he took a mobile surgery around the constituency every week. He had homes leafleted with messages encouraging constituents to bring their problems to him. In addition, since he was a journalist by trade, he was very good at securing publicity for his activities, often producing three or four articles a week in the local paper. Publicizing successful cases usually generated "a rash of 'me too' letters," further raising the demand for his services. In effect, Corbett's attitude towards casework was entrepreneurial: he was not simply meeting a fixed demand for ombudsmen-like activities, rather he was stimulating a greater demand for them.

What, one might ask, did the M.P. hope to achieve by these activities? One goal seems to have been to establish

electoral credit. He thought that by taking up all sorts of cases, he would not only win the support of those who were directly aided, but also create for himself high name recognition and the reputation for being a good constituency man. Although he was defeated in the May 1979 General Election, he could claim some success in achieving his electoral goals. A poll conducted in one of the areas where he had concentrated his casework activities showed greater than 80 percent name recognition. On the other hand, his efforts did not keep him in office. Even though he had expected the electoral advantage to be marginal, he had hoped that it would be sufficient to enable him to withstand a moderate swing to the Conservatives. As it turned out, the national swing was not moderate and although he beat the regional swing by 5 percentage points, it was not enough to offset the large swing to the Conservatives in the South.

A second motivation for the Labour Member's activities was his desire to please the local party activists. He believes that his local connections had been a factor in his selection. As a long time resident of the community, he knew the particular needs and demands of the constituency, and this had given him a "leg up" on the outside candidates. Also, his pledge to defend constituency interests more closely than previous Members had made a favourable impression upon the selection committee. There were other advantages that might come from fulfilling his selection speech promises such as building up the morale of the party activists and increasing local membership and enthusiasm for party work. He

also hoped that it might buy him some much-needed personal credit with his activists in the event that they might disagree over policy. In fact, the success of his strategy vis-a-vis party activists was, like the electoral goal, somewhat mixed. Discussions with local Labour party officers indicated that the Labour Member was widely regarded inside his constituency Labour party as a good constituency man. He was well liked and people acknowledged that he kept in touch with the party's activists. Still, his "grassrooting" did not prevent opposition to his positions from within the party. In particular, left-wing party members were critical of him for not taking a stronger stand against the Labour government's public expenditure cuts. As one party officer put it, relations between the Labour Member and his local party were "good most of the time, but not excellent." The possibility that his relations with the party might have been worse had he not kept in close touch is real, but of necessity a matter of speculation.

Looking at the overall impact of the Labour Member's constituency strategy, it is easy to see several possible sources of tension. Maintaining high visibility in the constituency meant that he would be drawing attention and publicity away from ambitious local politicians, and that he would find it harder to stay out of local controversies which might potentially split his support. Handling local cases might be seen as "meddling" in the affairs of local permanent officials and of the local council. Added to these problems was that of a local council dominated by the opposing party during his last

three years in office. Given these conditions, the difficulties the Labour Member encountered were not all that surprising.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE M.P. AND THE LOCAL PERMANENT OFFICIALS

Relations with permanent local officials in the constituency are of crucial importance for those Members who handle local cases regularly. Good contacts facilitate the resolution of cases both in the sense that requests are less likely to be relegated to the bottom of the file and also that Members who know officials well can develop informal signalling conventions which allow the one to know the other's true intentions. The latter is particularly important in those instances when the Member needs to demonstrate sincere effort to his or her constituent, but does not think that the constituent has a valid claim. When relations are close, the M.P. can indicate to the official that only the formalities need be observed. The M.P. gets a letter he can show his constituent as proof of his effort while the permanent official is spared making a special effort for an unworthy case. Since some proportion are hopeless or crank cases, both the M.P. and the official need the protection such informal relations provide.

In this constituency, the Labour Member was forced to deal with the Chief Executive primarily and was unable to develop an extensive set of working relations with lower level department officials. The Chief Executive referred to this as their "arrangement"

but did not tell us much about how or why the "arrangement" came about. It was only later that we discovered that the Labour Member had been denied direct access to officers in various departments because it was felt that he had abused his privilege by publicizing the details of cases too frequently. Significantly, neither of the Conservative Members before or after him had been forced into such an arrangement.

The Labour Member's standard procedures for handling a local case were to refer it to local councillors when he could or to channel the request to the Chief Executive who would forward it to the relevant department: from there, it would be passed on to the appropriate officer. The local permanent officials were able to insist that he send cases through the Chief Executive, because in their view the Member had no rights or powers in these affairs and their cooperation was a matter of "courtesy". As a result of this imposed screening system, there was a considerable amount of interaction between the Chief Executive and the M.P. A typical week would bring six to ten letters from the Member to the Chief Executive. By comparison, requests from the Labour Member were only a small trickle in the enormous flow of one hundred letters or so per day to certain departments such as Housing and Health. The supply of desirable council homes in this constituency as in many areas in Britain is far less than the demand for them so that waits of up to two to three years are not uncommon. Under such conditions, constituents naturally feel very intensely about housing issues, and complaints are voluminous. A complaint endorsed by the M.P.,

however, was comparatively infrequent. The Director of Housing and Health estimated that approximately 95 percent of all housing requests went through normal bureaucratic channels, 4 to 5 percent came through the local councillors and less than 1 percent came through the M.P.

As a consequence of their frequent dealings together, the Labour Member and the Chief Executive developed fairly close working relations. At the same time, it was a guarded relationship. The Chief Executive took special care not to be pulled in a partisan direction, particularly since the district council was predominantly Conservative. There was always the danger, he explained, that his statements would be used politically by the Labour M.P. in his struggle with the council. The Chief Executive felt that there was always an underlying tension between the need to work closely with the M.P. to ensure that complaints were dealt with expeditiously on the one hand and the need to maintain a safe distance to stay out of political fights on the other.

Given that the M.P. has no formal power in local affairs, we asked several local officials why, and in what ways, they paid attention to the Member's requests. The Housing Director told us that a complaint coming from an M.P. did not get special treatment per se: if the complaint was unjustified, there would be no special circumstances applied to it. However, the M.P.'s enquiry was usually given a higher priority in the sense that where the normal time for a reply was about four months, the department would handle the M.P.'s request in a matter of days.

As for why the M.P.'s request received a higher priority, there were two responses. One, already mentioned, was that while it was not a "duty" or "right", the M.P. was entitled to a prompt reply as a matter of "courtesy." But in addition, it was based on a wariness of the consequences of not responding properly. As one official frankly admitted, an M.P.'s letter was viewed with apprehension since in most cases, if the letter got that far, it indicated that the complaint was important. When asked what would happen if they did not respond, we were told that the M.P. could cause a great deal of trouble by giving the department bad publicity. The fear of a messy, public row formed a strong incentive to comply. Thus, the M.P.'s influence in these matters derives both from the courtesy of good working relations with permanent officials and from the implicit threat of public exposure of departmental or individual incompetence.

Not surprisingly, the Labour Member was viewed with some suspicion by the local authorities. The fact of recurring intervention by the M.P. was pretty much accepted by all of them as "part of the normal democratic process." Still, a couple felt that the M.P. was most useful when he dealt with complaints and lobbied for the constituency at the national level. The Chief Executive told us, for example, that ideally complaints should come through normal bureaucratic channels and not by the political route, and that the M.P. should be able to concentrate on national affairs and leave local matters to the councillors. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that the individual M.P. ultimately had to have the discretion to choose his or her own

style of representation. Moreover, it was clear that the constituents now expected their M.P. to be active in constituency affairs.

CASEWORK AND COUNCILLORS

Local cases brought the Labour Member into frequent contact with district and county councillors as well as with local department officials, because his services overlapped, and in some sense competed, with those of the councillors. For example, many of the cases he received could have been sent to the councillors. Indeed, some M.P.s and councillors maintain that local authority complaints such as housing, education, or roadworks should not really be sent to the M.P. at all. A combination of factors -- the lower salience of councillors, the fact that councillors are part-time, and the expectations of constituents -- have increasingly placed more of the burden on the M.P.'s shoulders. In some instances, the M.P. gets the case after it has been initially handled by the councillors, but in many instances, local cases come to the M.P. directly.

Most of the councillors we interviewed handled citizen complaints and thought that it was an important aspect of their job. When our sample was asked what they considered to be their role in the constituency, 47 percent mentioned their job as a go-between for citizens with complaints about local government (see Table 1). Only a very small minority said that their responsibility was policy making only and not casework. There was some partisan difference in the way that the councillors defined their role. Labour councillors

were more inclined to mention casework than their Conservative counterparts, but this could be true for a number of reasons.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

One plausible explanation is that having a Labour M.P. who was active in casework served to increase the involvement of the Labour councillors. This was certainly the Labour Member's perception of the situation, and, as we shall see, there is some evidence that he was right.

As is evident in Table 2, councillors handled far fewer cases than either of the two Members in part, of course, because their jurisdictions are much smaller. Compared to the Labour Member's eighty cases per week and to his successor's twenty-five per week, the councillors reported handling an average of four cases per week. The average, of course, hides some dispersion. A couple of councillors on key committees reported caseloads in the 15-20 per week range, but on the whole, it is safe to say that individual councillor caseloads are very light. In addition, most do not hold surgeries. In several instances, the councillors had apparently tried to hold regular surgeries, but discovered in the end that the yield in cases did not justify the effort. Most of the councillors also reported that they did not actively seek out cases. A few periodically attended Corbett's surgeries to help with the local cases he received, but most waited until a constituent initiated a complaint before they took action. As Table 2 shows, there was some difference between the parties

TABLE 1

PERCEIVED ROLE IN THE CONSTITUENCY

	ALL	CONS. COUNCILLORS	LABOR COUNCILLORS	IND
Handling Constituent Complaints	47 (15)	16 (5)	31 (10)	0 (0)
Representing Ward Interests	22 (7)	13 (4)	9 (3)	0 (0)
Overseeing Local Authority Policy	25 (8)	9 (3)	16 (5)	0 (0)
Supporting Party	3 (1)	0 (0)	3 (1)	0 (0)
General Representation	28 (9)	16 (5)	6 (2)	6 (2)
Attend Meetings	3 (1)	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Policy Matters Only no individual Complaints	6 (2)	6 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)

n = 45

Percentages are those of total sample who mention a particular category in either first or second response to the question of what their most important responsibilities are. Numbers of responses are in parentheses.

in terms of holding surgeries and soliciting cases, but as before, this too may be explained by the partisan lines of cooperation between the M.P. and the councillors in this constituency.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Cooperation between the councillor and the M.P. took two forms. M.P.s passed certain sorts of cases along to the councillors and they in turn referred others to the Member. Instances of both were fairly frequent in the constituency we studied. Approximately 89 percent of the councillors we interviewed at one time or another had a case referred to them by one of the Members. Since the Conservative M.P. had just been elected at the time of the interviews and five years had elapsed since the last Conservative had held the seat, the bulk of the reported referrals had come from the defeated Labour Member. Of those who did get referrals from the M.P., most did not get many. The greatest proportion got fewer than twenty cases per year, but a small number of Labour councillors reported that they received one hundred or more cases per year. It seems, then, that the Labour Member relied very heavily on a few councillors to help him with his casework rather than distributing the load evenly.

A striking feature of referrals from the Member is the degree to which they followed partisan lines. Members in this constituency were more likely to refer cases to councillors of their own party than to those of the opposing party. All referrals to the Labour councillors in our sample came from

the Labour Member and none came from either the past or present Conservative members. Moreover, the six who reported referrals in excess of one hundred per year were all Labour councillors. By contrast, eight of the Conservative councillors had never received a referral from the Labour Member, including four who had never received a case from any M.P. Also, among those who had received cases from an M.P., the Conservative councillors tended to get fewer than the Labour councillors.

[INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 HERE]

There were several reasons offered as to why the M.P. referred cases to the councillors. The most common, especially among Conservative councillors, was that they occupied a key position on a committee with jurisdiction over the case -- for example, the housing committee. Another frequent response, divided evenly among councillors from both parties, was that the M.P. had sent cases along to them because they had more time, or were in a better position to deal with the problem adequately. In particular, several Labour councillors indicated that their cooperation had been essential because, as discussed earlier, the Labour member had been denied access to lower level department officials. When the Labour Member needed to get in touch with local officials in certain departments without going through the Chief Executive, he would turn to his councillors. The need for direct, unmediated contact with the local departments was therefore the third reason for referrals to

TABLE 2

COUNCILLOR CASEWORK ACTIVITY

	ALL	CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLORS	LABOR COUNCILLORS
Average # of Cases Per Week	4	4	4-5
Percent who hold surgeries	22 (7)	3 (1)	19 (6)
Percent who seek out cases	22 (7)	6 (2)	16 (5)
Most frequent types of Cases	1. Housing 2. Roadworks 3. Education	1. Housing 2. Education 3. Roadworks	1. Housing 2. Roadworks 3. Social Services 4. Vandalism

TABLE 3
REFERRAL FROM M.P. TO COUNCILLORS

	ALL	CONSERVATIVE	LABOR	IND.
Yes, from Labor only	50 (16)	6 (2)	41 (13)	3 (1)
Yes, from Conservative only	13 (4)	13 (4)	0	0
Yes, from both	13 (4)	13 (4)	0 (1)	0 (1)

n = 24

councillors. A final reason was that the case originated from a particular councillor's ward, and the M.P. thought for that reason the councillor should be consulted.

As we noted before, not only do M.P.s refer cases to councillors, but councillors also refer cases to M.P.s. We can see from Table 4 that referrals of the latter kind seem to occur less frequently than those of the former. Half of the councillors we spoke to had never sent a case on to the M.P., and among those who had, very few ever referred more than ten cases a year to the M.P. Once again, it is important to see the partisan lines of cooperation. Labour councillors were more likely to have referred a case to the Labour Member, and Conservatives to the Conservative Member.

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF REFERRALS TO COUNCILLORS

	ALL	CONSERVATIVE	LABOR	IND.
Infrequently	6 (2)	6 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
1-20 per year	30 (10)	15 (5)	12 (4)	3 (1)
20-40 per year	9 (3)	3 (1)	6 (2)	0 (0)
100 Plus	18 (6)	0 (0)	18 (6)	0 (0)
Often	3 (1)	0 (0)	3 (1)	0 (0)
Varies	6 (2)	6 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)

n = 24

Percentages are of total sample and are listed on top. The number of cases is in parentheses below.

Apparently, the reluctance to pass cases to those outside the party extends in both directions.

[INSERT TABLES 5 AND 6 HERE]

Most of the explanations given for referring a case to the M.P. were related to the M.P.'s national position. For example, one was that the Member had access to the Ministers of national departments and could bring attention at the highest level to a case. This reason was cited by councillors in both parties. In addition, the Member often had information on national policies which the district or county councillor could not get on his or her own. Finally, there were those who referred cases to the M.P. because they thought that it was his proper responsibility, which

TABLE 5
REFERRALS OF CASES FROM COUNCILLORS TO M.P.

	<u>ALL</u>	<u>CONS.</u>	<u>LAB.</u>	<u>IND.</u>
Yes, to Lab.	33 (10)	7 (2)	23 (7)	3 (1)
Yes, to Cons.	17 (5)	13 (4)	0	3 (1)
No	50 (15)	33 (10)	17 (5)	0

n = 30

usually meant that the case did not fall within normal jurisdiction of the council.

Bearing in mind the partisan nature of casework interactions in this constituency, it is not surprising that the councillors we talked to felt that their working relationship with the M.P. was much closer when the M.P. belonged to their party. All of the Labour councillors said that they had had good working relationships with the Labour M.P. while the majority of the Conservative Councillors (11 out of 14) felt that their working relationships with him had been distant, or in several instances, nonexistent. Conversely, most of the Conservative councillors (again, 11 out of 14) said that they had good working relationships with the newly elected Conservative M.P. while all the Labour councillors said that they did not. Of the two independents in our sample, one reported good working relationships with one of the two M.P.s.

The ambivalence of the local community to the Labour Member's expanded constituency role is most evident in the responses to the question, "What do you think is the proper role of the M.P. in the constituency?" Some were quite enthusiastic about having an M.P. who was closely involved in the constituency's affairs. They felt that the Labour Member provided an excellent role model, and their description of how an M.P. should ideally behave was clearly drawn from his example. Typical remarks from those holding this view were that "the M.P. should be accessible to his constituents," "constituents should come first," "the M.P.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCY OF REFERRALS FROM COUNCILLORS TO M.P.

	<u>ALL</u>	<u>CONS.</u>	<u>LAB.</u>	<u>IND.</u>
Very Infrequent (1 per year or less)	6 (2)	3 (1)	0 (0)	3 (1)
2-10	18 (6)	3 (1)	12 (4)	3 (1)
7-11	9 (3)	6 (2)	3 (1)	0 (0)
Often	3 (1)	0 (0)	3 (1)	0 (0)
Varies	3 (1)	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Never	50 (17)	30 (10)	20 (7)	0 (0)

n = 24

Percentages are of total sample and are listed on top. The number of cases is in parentheses below.

should be about a lot in the constituency," "the M.P. should play two roles -- national and local," "the M.P. should fight for the rights of people in the constituency," "the M.P. should look after the constituency in Parliament to get it what it wants," or simply that the Member "should be a good constituency M.P."

The opposing view was that the Labour Member's constituency role had been excessive, and that M.P.s should concentrate on national matters. Those who held this general position did so with varying degrees of extremity. A few, the moderates, believed that the M.P. should be a court of last resort on local matters, intervening only after other means of redress have been exhausted. In their eyes, the Labour Member's excess was taking up local cases in the first instance, and what was worse, actively seeking them out. The M.P.'s role, they thought, should be more oriented towards national responsibilities. The Member can best maintain a balance by representing the constituency in Parliament primarily, and only occasionally interfering in the affairs of the county or district council. As one of those we interviewed told us, an M.P. "should concentrate on national affairs and do enough locally to keep his constituents happy." The Labour Member had upset this balance by regularly interfering in local matters.

A more extreme version of this general view was that M.P.'s should deal with national issues exclusively and not get at all involved in constituency affairs. According to this version, the M.P. is elected to Parliament to carry out party

principles and deliberate on national issues, not to do casework. Local matters should be left to the councillors. Examples of this position are such statements as "the M.P. should represent the national party in central government," the "M.P. shouldn't be dealing with local matters since it diverts too much of his time from national issues," "the M.P. shouldn't get involved in the councillor's problems," the "M.P. shouldn't allow himself to be dictated to by his constituents," "the M.P. should be putting forward the case for issues," and "the M.P. should stick to Parliamentary duties and not waste time on cases." As one of them put it, unlike the previous M.P., the ideal M.P. "should keep out of the way" and not "jump on every local bandwagon."

Taking all the responses together, we developed eight categories and recorded the frequency with which each was mentioned. This is shown in Table 7. The modal response was that an M.P. should be available to his or her constituents as much as possible. This was suggested by councillors from both parties, but most often by Labour. The second most frequent response was that the Member should represent constituency interests in Parliament, which includes such activities as lobbying ministers about constituency problems, raising questions in Parliament and bringing publicity to local problems. As with the category of "being available," Labour councillors tended to be more likely than Conservative councillors to mention "representing constituency interests" as important. Conservative councillors, on the other hand, were more inclined to say that the M.P. should concentrate on Parliamentary duties primarily. They were also more

TABLE 7

PROPER ROLE OF M.P.

	<u>ALL</u>	<u>CONSERVATIVE</u>	<u>LABOR</u>	<u>INDEPENDENT</u>
Represent Constituency Interest	19 (11)	10 (3)	31 (8)	0
Available to Citizens	30 (17)	21 (6)	42 (11)	0
Party Primary	9 (5)	10 (3)	8 (2)	0
Local	7 (4)	10 (3)	4 (1)	0
Parliamentary Primary	18 (10)	27 (8)	8 (2)	0
Local	3 (2)	0	8 (2)	0
Inform Citizens	10 (6)	17 (5)	0	50 (1)
General Representation	4 (2)	3 (1)	0	50 (1)

n = 57

Percentages are column based and are listed on top.
Number of cases are listed in parentheses.

Likely to mention the Member's informational role -- that is, answering queries and keeping citizens informed about government policies -- and to say that the M.P. should act as a backup, or route of appeal for local cases which the councillors could not resolve in the first instance. In fact, looking at the overall pattern, Labour councillors appear to have been more likely to mention constituency-oriented functions than the Conservative councillors, and moreover, those constituency functions which the Conservative councillors did mention -- such as providing information to citizens and serving as a backup to councillors -- implied somewhat less interference in local affairs.

As far as one can tell from the evidence, therefore, the Labour Member's constituency involvement had a significant impact upon the councillors in his constituency. Cooperation between the Member and the councillors -- especially Labour -- occurred frequently as cases passed in both directions between them. The Labour Member's willingness to handle cases of all kinds increased the councillors' caseload. The councillors themselves were divided in their assessment of his constituency style. Many praised him for his responsiveness to constituency interests, but others -- mostly Conservative, but including some Labour councillors -- thought his interference excessive and felt that he should have stuck to national affairs.

THE INTERACTION OF CANDIDATE STRATEGIES

The M.P.'s style of representation can affect the strategy and behavior of opponents as well as that of community politicians and officials. The Conservatives feared that the

Labour Member's high name recognition might create a personal following in the constituency that would make it difficult to unseat him. In preparation for the 1979 election, they initially adopted a nationally prominent journalist as their candidate who was well versed in national issues and an excellent speaker, and for those reasons had made an impressive showing before the selection committee. Three weeks after his adoption, however, there was considerable dissatisfaction with his candidacy inside the party. Many of the activists felt that he lacked the personal touch and the willingness to fight the campaign effectively at the local level. He was subsequently dropped as their candidate in favor of a barrister who had lived in the constituency all his life.

The new Conservative candidate felt at the time that he "had to give him a taste of his own medicine" if he was to succeed in the election since the Labour Member was so well known that "he might have beaten the national trend." Consequently, the Conservative candidate began attending as many constituency functions as he could and doing casework. The people who came to him with their problems, he told us, did so because they were Conservatives who wanted their cases handled by a fellow Conservative. In retrospect, the Conservative Member feels that he overestimated his opponent's personal following. It is even possible, he contends, that his opponent was hurt by the excessive publicity of his constituency activities.

While the Conservative Member suspects the utility of heavy constituency involvement, he has found that in office he

is captive of the expectations created by his predecessors. Having had a very constituency oriented M.P., people in the constituency expect him to assume the same level of casework activity. Hence, though he doubts the political value of casework and does not think that that is what he was really elected to do, he has been forced by circumstances into adopting a style similar to his predecessor's.

This point is illustrated in Table 8 which compares the activities of both the defeated Labour and newly elected Conservative M.P. with those of the average M.P. In almost every category, both maintained a higher than average levels of activity. The notable exception is the below average number of cases the Conservative Member reported that he handled per week, but this can be explained by the fact that at the time of the interview, he had just been elected and had not yet fully established himself. Looking at the table closely, both held surgeries every week, putting them in the upper 16 percent of all M.P.s in terms of frequency of surgeries. Both moved their surgeries around to different locations in order to reach constituents from all corners of the constituency. Both actively solicited cases. The Labour Member did this through visits to different neighborhoods in a mobile van and by knocking on doors. The Conservative Association put out a "May I help you" pamphlet encouraging constituents to send their complaints to the Conservative Member and made a series of publicized walkabouts in town. Neither expressed any reluctance about handling local cases, although both would refer cases to councillors when they

TABLE 8

A COMPARISON OF THE CONSTITUENCY ACTIVITIES OF THE CONSERVATIVE AND LABOUR MEMBERS

	<u>LABOUR M.P.</u>	<u>CONSERVATIVE M.P.</u>	<u>NATIONAL AVERAGE</u>
Number of cases handled	80 p.w.	25 p.w.	45 p.w.
Number of surgeries per year	1 p.w.	1 p.w.	1 p.w.=16%
Seeks out cases	yes	yes	yes=30%
Handles local cases routinely	yes	yes	yes=68%
Types of cases handled	1. Housing 2. DHSS	1. Housing 2. Family and legal 3. DHSS 4. Education	1. Housing 2. DHSS 3. Tax 4. Legal
Number of Staff	1 p.t. secretary 1 p.t. agent volunteers	1 f.t. secretary in Westminster 1 f.t. agent and support 2 1/2 office workers Volunteers	2 or less staff =66%

NOTE: Source of national figures are Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina survey of 107 M.P.s and agents conducted in summer of 1979.

thought it was appropriate or might help the case. In terms of the types of cases they were receiving, both indicated that housing was the most frequent sort of complaint, which is consistent with national findings. Aside from the number of cases, the only other important difference between them was that the Conservative Member enjoys considerably greater staff support than did the Labour Member. Ironically, the Conservative Member found that his advantage in support did not free him from casework: he told us that he did not feel that he could turn cases over to his staff because people in the constituency had come to expect the personal attention of the Member.

One can see then how a Member's style can be dictated to him by the expectations of his constituents and the behavior of his predecessor. The Conservative Member wanted to pursue a more nationally oriented representational style, but could not ignore the legacy of his predecessor's activities. There appears to be a logic of escalation inherent in grassroots politics: as a candidate tries to match the advantage the other has gained through constituency service, the level of public expectations increases, and the demands of the Member's job shift in important and unintended ways. Such, it appears, was the experience in this constituency.

CONCLUSION

This case study has analyzed the impact of an M.P.'s constituency activities upon his local community. There are several observations which can be drawn from this exercise.

First, in this constituency, much of the M.P.'s casework activity was influenced by the strength of party divisions. The partisanship of cooperation at the local level in Great Britain is certainly not a surprising finding, but it does contrast sharply with the American pattern of constituency service, which is largely free from partisan influence.

Models of constituency service in the U.S. depict a triangular pattern of cooperation between three actors. Citizens seek help for their problems with the bureaucracy, politicians handle cases in the hope that it will help them get reelected, and bureaucrats develop close ties with legislators in order to defend the interests of their agency (Fiorina, 1977). Partisan influence is virtually nonexistent in this model. In the British constituency we studied, however, the party played a major role. An important reason for handling citizen complaints -- apart from the electoral -- was to satisfy the expectations of party activists. Party was also a factor in the sense that some voters in the constituency felt uneasy about bringing their problems to an M.P. who did not belong to their party. Or, to speak of another example, cooperation between M.P.s and councillors on constituent cases occurred primarily within party lines. Clearly, party cannot be left out of the British model.

A second observation is that very close involvement by the M.P. in the affairs of the local council can cause tensions to arise between the M.P. and local councillors or permanent officials. A few of the councillors from the Labour Member's

own party felt that the rightful focus of the M.P. was exclusively national and would have preferred having the Member leave local matters to the councillors. Several local permanent officials also expressed concern with the Labour Member's involvement in council matters and with his practice of publicizing their mistakes. It would appear that the M.P. must carefully consider the trade-off between maintaining sufficiently good relations with local permanent officials in order to secure their cooperation and threatening them with exposure when necessary for the resolution of a case. This may be a difficult balance to maintain.

Finally, a major effect of diligent casework seems to be that it generates high expectations for those services among constituents. What is expected of newly elected M.P.s depends in part upon the pattern set by their predecessors. An M.P. who is actively involved in his constituency sets the pace for his successor. The fear of getting a reputation for being a bad constituency man may be as strong as the incentive of positive gains from being a good constituency man. In the era of new reelection procedures, the need to attend to one's constituency affairs in order to avoid a bad reputation may become even more important. The M.P. who has good personal relations with his or her local party and a reputation of concern for the constituency may be less vulnerable to unseating by militant activists. If so, the effect may be to increase the level of constituency responsibilities.

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