

Political discrimination against men in Britain: A chronology

Produced by Skimmington, (Editor, [The Rights of Man](#))

This short chronology charts how men have gradually been disenfranchised within the political system by barriers being put in their place from standing for public office. From the use of all-women shortlists, through to A-lists, gender quotas and even in the Conservative case awarding people seats when they polled lower votes in election contests – this paper sets out how men are becoming politically marginalised.

Labour led the way with its all-women shortlists (used 136 times since 1993) and the Conservatives, while taking a long time to get round to it have followed Labour by using A-Lists and quotas. The Liberal Democrats have discussed positive discrimination but not done anything structurally about it beyond special courses.

Effectively, if you are a man and want to run for MP with the main political parties it is far harder to be selected than if you were a woman. The sole reason is your gender – not your talent or ability – it is because you are a man.

Not only does this situation deny men the opportunity to stand for Parliament it also denies the public the opportunity to vote for the best possible candidate for the party they support. As the vast majority of people vote for the party not the candidate this is important. Those who vote Labour in a seat where an all-women shortlist (AWS) has been used to select the candidate does not know whether the women they are voting for was the best candidate to represent them.

Another invidious part that is often forgotten is where an AWS is used it means many men who are community leaders (council leaders etc) are denied the chance to stand for Parliament if a local opportunity arises solely because of their gender. This led to Peter Law standing as an independent in Blaenau Gwent.

Many commentators will point out that there are more men than women MP's but that is because more men currently want to become MP's than women (this can be seen by the number applying to political parties which for the Conservatives is 3:1). Instead of looking at the reason for this (and then deciding whether it is a problem or not) and issues around equality of opportunity, the debate has been based on equality of outcome and the parties have accepted it rather than taking on the vested interests who want special treatment for women.

As the chronology will show, men are being sexually discriminated against, the political franchise is being denied to them and since 2002 it is technically legal.

However, it is likely to be in breach of European equality and human rights legislation but we need a brave man to take that on.

One final note, I would like to pay tribute to Peter Jepson, Roger Dyas-Elliott and Peter Law for standing up against the tyranny of the sexist AWS. These heroes have never had the credit they deserved.

(1) Late 80's

(a) Labour party

Shortlist quotas had been introduced in the late 1980's (with limited effect) – equal numbers of men and women on shortlists.

In 1989 a motion had been passed ensuring equal representation for women at all levels within the party including on the National Executive Committee (NEC).

Source: Institute of Government - [Party People: How should the Political Parties select their Parliamentary Candidates](#) (page 28-29)

(2) 1993-1997

(a) Labour Party

Labour introduced all-women shortlists in 50% of all vacant or winnable seats (winnable being defined as those within a 6% swing). The implementation of the AWS policy between 1993 and 1996 resulted in the selection of 38 women candidates, 35 of whom became MPs in 1997.

Labour leader (Tony Blair) says it would be only for one election only which becomes untrue.

Source: Institute of Government - [Party People: How should the Political Parties select their Parliamentary Candidates](#) (page 28-29)

Labour's policy meant that in 38 parliamentary seats, men were banned from putting their names forward to be the Labour party candidate even if they were members of the Labour party and had passed internal party tests to ensure they were capable of being an MP. Local Labour parties who select the candidates in their constituencies are told they must pick from an AWS and are then only given a slate of females to pick their candidate from. If they say no, they get disbanded and a candidate is imposed.

As the results of the 1997 election show it meant that 35 women had become MP's because of the gender not their talent or ability. It also denied Labour voting members of the public the opportunity to vote for the best available Labour candidate to be their MP. Many of those MP's are still in Parliament such as Dame Anne Begg and Maria Eagle.

Wikipedia's useful background note on AWS can be found [here](#).

(3) 1995

(a) Labour Party

In 1996 two male trade unionists, Peter Jepson and Robert Dyas-Elliott, took the Labour party to an employment tribunal claiming that the AWS policy was in breach of the Sex Discrimination Act and won their case. Labour was forced to drop AWS for the remaining selections ahead of the 1997 election.

Source: Institute of Government - [Party People: How should the Political Parties select their Parliamentary Candidates](#) (page 28-29)

[Peter Jepson](#) and Roger Dyas-Elliott are one of the legions of unsung heroes of the male equality movement. They made a stand against the sexism and discrimination they faced and won.

Peter Jepson sets out his disappointment at the Labour Party's response and gives his views of what happened [here](#).

As reported in the [Bolton News](#), the case was supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission and was basically an industrial tribunal (an employment tribunal) where both Jepson and Dyas-Elliott were discriminated against because the tribunal judged that the role of an MP was a form of employment.

[Louise Ellman](#) (then leader of Lancashire county council and now Liverpool) who herself was one of the 35 who had benefitted from this sexism was disappointed.

[The Independent](#) at the time covered the main players, the story of the tribunal case and also its successful [conclusion](#). This [feature](#) was somewhat unflattering of both people but gives a good insight into the case – it certainly was David and Goliath, and the Labour party, who say they believe in equality, never forgave them. Labour were allowed to keep the 38 female candidates who had already benefitted from AWS in place.

What was also of interest was the fact that the Equal Opportunities Commission supported them. This was under a Conservative government in 1995/1996. Once the Labour government came to power in 1997, the Commission was captured

by radical feminists who had been educated and radicalised in the 70's and 80's. Never again would the Commission (now subsumed into the Equalities and Human Rights Commission) ever oppose such policies, instead they fervently endorse them and are a leading and vocal player in supporting AWS shortlists, A-lists and quotas, and continually attack the number of men in Parliament.

(4) 1997-2001

(a) Labour Party

The success of Jepson and Dyas-Elliott meant Labour were unable to use AWS. The Labour Party instead introduced a requirement that local party shortlists had an equal number of men and women candidates (the approach used between 1987 and 1992).

Source: Institute of Government - [Party People: How should the Political Parties select their Parliamentary Candidates](#) (page 28-29)

(5) 2002

(a) Labour Party

Having successfully won the general election in 2001, the Labour Government passed the [Sex Discrimination \(Election Candidates\) Act](#) in 2002, granting political parties the freedom to use positive discrimination measures. A good summary is available on [Wikipedia](#) and the [House of Commons Library](#) and the explanatory notes to the Act are [here](#).

The Act does not just include AWS but also can mean quotas, special lists (A Lists) and other tactics if so wanted.

The act reverses the results of the industrial tribunal won by Jepson and Dyas-Elliott, though Jepson maintains that this Act is illegal http://www.peterjepson.com/sex_discrimination.htm http://www.peterjepson.com/positive_action.htm and [Thompsons](#) suggest that it is in breach of EU treaties. Sadly, no one has yet challenged them.

The Act allows political parties to discriminate against candidates based on gender and is in laymen's terms an opt-out of the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act.

The House of Commons debate can be found [here](#) and [here](#) (including [comments](#) from Theresa May – now Minister for Women – who questions its

legality however she has now actively adopted and championed the measures within it).

(b) Conservative Party

While the Conservatives had reservations about how the Act would work and also its illegality, there was no real opposition to it bar Ann Widdecombe and Virginia Bottomley. The Conservatives supported the Act.

Theresa May [said](#) " I repeat that the official Opposition support the Bill's aim, which is to get more women elected to Parliament and to other elected bodies. We also support the fact that the Bill is permissive, and allows political parties to make their own judgments about the action that they should take to ensure that more women are selected, and then elected."

In 2011, Conservative MP, [Philip Davies](#), tried to repeal it.

(6) 2003-05

(a) Labour Party

With the new Act in place, Labour went back to using all-women shortlists with great gusto. They used it in 30 seats and 25 women were successfully elected – so in 30 seats men were denied the opportunity to be the Labour candidate solely because of their gender.

A full list of successful women, selected through an AWS, in the 1997 and 2005 general elections can be found [here](#).

The main reason why with 650 MP's the figure looks low is due to the electoral cycle. With so many new MP's being elected for the Labour Party in 1997, there were very few vacancies in 'winnable' or 'marginal' seats as for spaces to occur there was a reliance on Labour MP's standing down to create vacancies.

In Blaenau Gwent, South Wales, Labour used an AWS to select their candidate for the 2005 general election when the previous MP retired. However, this meant [Peter Law](#), a local Labour Welsh assembly member and councillor was not allowed to even put his name forward for Labour party selection let alone succeed during the interview process. He left the Labour Party in disgust, stood as an independent and won. Sadly [he died](#) in 2006, just over a year after winning the seat and so desperate were Labour for him not to stand as an independent they offered him a [peerage](#) which he refused. Peter Law is a hero.

(7) 2005-2010

(a) Labour Party

With the ‘success’ of the all-women shortlist and the large number of Labour MP’s standing down due to age, the expenses scandal and the fear of losing their seat as they were behind in the polls, Labour almost doubled the use of the AWS.

As pointed out on the [Rights of Man](#) website who urged men not to vote Labour in any of these seats, Labour used the all women-shortlist for 58 seats for the 2010 general election.

In another 58 places men were discriminated against.

Labour were egged on by an increasingly vocal anti-male feminist movement. The Electoral Reform Society who under a supposed veneer of respectability and neutrality want fewer men in Parliament for no reason except that they are men – even desperately [denouncing](#) the first-past-the-post system as being anti-women. They produced a report called New Government, New Women (no longer available online) and the Fawcett Society produced a report Why Women’s representation matters (again no longer available). The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (then the Equal Opportunities Commission) also kept stating how backward Britain was and called for more positive discrimination for women in their [Sex and Power](#) range of anti-male publications.

Labour also had a special group called [Emily’s List](#) to raise money and support the cause and even the Speaker of the House of Commons (John Bercow – nominally a Conservative) had a big [conference](#) about it and the full length of anti-male special pleading for special treatment can be read in its ‘glory’ by the submissions sent to the conference.

(b) Conservatives

After becoming leader in 2005, David Cameron swiftly made it clear that increasing the number of women and ethnic minority Conservative MPs was a priority, stating that: "The conversation we have in the Conservative party must reflect the conversation in the country, and the sound of modern Britain is a complex harmony, not a male voice choir."

To achieve this goal, a new list of preferred candidates was introduced, known as the “priority list” or more commonly the “A-List”. The strategy was to increase the ‘supply’ of female and BAME candidates from which local associations could select, seen by many as the key problem in the party, rather than to impose strict obligations on the ‘demand’ side, through mechanisms such as all-women shortlists.

(c) The Conservative Party A-List

The mathematics of the A-list, which was deliberately designed to make it harder for a male to become an 'A-listener' than a woman can be [seen](#) by the fact that 87 people on the A-List were women and 62 were men, yet 73% of the candidates' list (the central pool of candidates) were male (544) and 27% female (203).

The maths are complicated but at a superficial level women on the candidates' list had a 43% chance of being on the A-list while a man had an 11% chance – four times harder. 544 men only had 62 opportunities to be on the A-list (482 failed) while 203 women had 87 opportunities (only 116 failed). Over four times as many men were unable to get onto the A-list than women. Of the 598 who failed, 81% were male.

The A-list was important because only candidates on the A-List could apply to be conservative candidates in what were deemed 'winnable' or 'marginal' seats. The only way around this was for a person to declare that they were a local candidate and therefore could plead for special dispensation. Due to the antipathy ([only 6% of Conservative members](#) felt it produced the most talented candidates) towards the A-list by selecting conservative associations, many went for a local candidate - 43 of the first 88 selections using the A-List rules were local candidates. There was also the charge of cronyism and people getting on the list solely because they were party favourites.

The A-list was sexist because it was deliberately made far harder for a man to get onto the A-list than a woman. There was no pretence about quality. All things being equal 73% of the candidates on the A-list should have been male yet only 42% of the A-list candidates were male.

The whole system was also propped up with groups like [Women2Win](#), a ginger group set up to cheerlead women with an undercurrent of antagonism towards men (though they would deny it). The group led by Anne Jenkin (now Lady Jenkin of Kensington) and actively supported by the Conservative party raised funds for female candidates and also arranged free training and courses including hiring speechwriting help for female candidates. Men had to fund any training and speechwriters themselves if they wanted to use them. Women2Win also kept a secret collection of questions that were being asked at Conservative selection interviews which would then help women prepare for interviews in other seats as they could see the type of questions being asked of them.

(d) Conservative party gender quotas

As the antipathy towards this policy arose, Cameron went for a gender quotas which meant that when an association was selecting candidates, it had to pick

the same number of men and women for each round (although if there were more women than men who were suitable this rule was then 'relaxed').

So far example, at each of the three selection round process, there had to be (for example):

First round – 10 men and 10 women

Second round – 4 men and 4 women

Final round – 2 men and 2 women.

Firstly it did not matter how many men or women applied, there had to be the same number interviewed in the first round. So if the association ranked the candidates and of the first 20, 15 were men and five were women, then only the first 10 men would get an interview but five would not. The first five women would get an interview, but another five women would also be selected. These latter five women would have been scored more lowly than five men denied an interview.

This process also occurred during the interviews themselves so at Round One if the top eight people (to get through to Round Two) were made up of six men and two women, to even things up it would mean that the fifth and sixth ranked men would be rejected and replaced with two women (to make it four each) even though fifth and sixth men had scored more highly than their female replacements.

This is clear sexism as people are judged on the basis of their gender not their proven ability.

Some examples of this discrimination occurred in a number of seats.

Example one – One 'safe Conservative seat had 171 applicants with 128 men and 43 women applying and 20 were selected for interview (10 of each gender).

It meant that there were ten places for 128 men and ten for 43 women. It meant that only one male per 13 male applicants (7% chance of an interview) had an interview yet one female for every four female applicants (23.2% chance of an interview) received an interview. Just under four times as many men did not get an interview than women (118 men and 33 women) and 78% of those without an interview were male.

Example two – After eight interviews in Round Two (four men and four women), the top four places were all men but the third and fourth man had to make way for two women who had come 5th and 6th.

(e) Conservatives - 2009 European election selection process

The most scandalous example of political sexism against men ever in the UK was the selection of the Conservative candidates for the 2009 European elections.

With AWS, while men are not allowed to compete there is always the possibility the female candidates would have been the best and therefore won anyway.

With the gender quota system it was shown that some men, who either when interviewed or when sifted at the pre-interview stage, were scoring more highly than some women but those women were then leapfrogging them into the next round or for an interview.

Much of this was hidden though as the results of selections and sifting was confidential and only through sites like [Conservative Home](#) could it be seen when people put comments on the site.

The European selection process has been the biggest scandal because the results were made public and elections so significant.

The system worked like this:

The European elections are different to Parliamentary elections where the former uses a list system and the latter the first-past-the-post system. The list system basically allocates the number of MEPs in each region to each party based on the number of seats available.

In London, for example, there are 10 seats so if Labour get 40%, they get four seats, the Conservatives on 40% get the same and the Liberal Democrats on 20% get two.

The way the parties allocate who gets the seats is to have a 'slate' of ten candidates ranked in order. So the top four on Labour's list become MEPs and likewise for the Conservatives.

What the Conservatives did for the 2009 round of selections was to allow party members to choose the ranking of the candidates on the slate. However, if you were already a MEP (an incumbent) then you would be guaranteed to fill the top slot.

However, the first non-incumbent slot had to go to a woman, even if she had scored lower votes from party members than any non-incumbent male.

When the results were published (the [detail](#) is no longer on the Conservative party website – we wonder why?), it was [revealed](#) that seven non-incumbent women were given top slots (on the regional lists) even though they got fewer votes than non-incumbent male candidates.

Of these seven women, five were elected as MEPs so it means that five men should now be Conservatives MEP's but were denied their place because of their gender. This is not an opinion, or what could have been the case - it is a proven fact.

(8) 2010 onwards

(1) Labour Party

The Labour Party having lost a number of seats at the 2010 General Election found they had vacancies to fill again so back came the AWS.

The [Rights of Man](#) website identified 13 seats to use AWS for the 2015 general election

It means that from 1993, Labour have used AWS in 136 seats, denying those men the political franchise of being able to stand for Parliament in those seats

(2) Conservative Party

There has been no word on whether there will be another A-list or quotas. They are still running with [Women2Win](#) the exclusive group designed to help only women get selected and one where there is an undercurrent of unhealthy competition towards men.

(3) Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats have not gone down the road of quotas or AWS and have been holding out. They do run [special leadership programmes](#) which as they are women-only are of course discriminatory and sexist.

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