

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

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REGIONAL ORGANISATION
IN THE
CONSERVATIVE AND LABOUR PARTIES

by

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A thesis submitted for
the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy,
University of Warwick,
1974.

ABSTRACT

This study examines a hitherto neglected dimension of party organisation in Britain: the Conservative Party's area organisation and the Labour Party's regional structure. It is designed to extend our knowledge of party organisation by providing a detailed analysis of activity at this intermediate organisational level, which lies between the respective national party machines on the one hand and constituency associations on the other. Research into regional and area organisation clarifies the nature and extent of centralisation in the Conservative and Labour Parties.

The thesis argues that both the Conservative and Labour Parties established regional organising units primarily for reasons of political and administrative expediency. This pragmatism has characterised the subsequent evolution of regional and area machinery. Regional and area organisers act as the field administrative agents of their respective head offices. They spend much of their time working at the constituency and city party levels but have little formal authority; they must, in general, rely on informal influence to achieve their objectives. They cannot act as centralising agents for their parties because although their own relationship with the centre is tightly controlled, they themselves lack authority at the local level. There is no chain of command from the respective party leaderships to constituency and branch levels via regional and area organisers. The chain of command from the centre ends at the regional level.

The democratic party structure at the regional and area level is largely dominated by the professional organisers in both parties although Conservative area chairmen can be figures of some importance. A case study of the 1970 General Election provides a detailed analysis of the work undertaken by regional and area staff. There is also a discussion of the different organisational emphases stemming from the Conservative Party's greater professionalism at the constituency level. It is argued that while the Labour Party clearly requires its regional network the Conservative Party's need for an extensive area structure is questionable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mr. J.G. Bulpitt for his constructive criticism and continued encouragement.

This study would not have been possible without the very generous help of regional and area staff, both Labour and Conservative Party headquarters and constituency agents. In particular, regional organisers and area agents in the East Midlands, the West Midlands and the North West spent many hours in answering questions about their work. Grateful thanks are owed to them all.

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INTRODUCTION

1. British Political Parties: A Note on the Literature

In 1967 L.D. Epstein observed: "Writing about political parties in Western democracies is not a novel enterprise. It is several decades since political scientists, once pre-occupied with constitutional forms, ceased to neglect parties".

(1) Despite the increased interest in political parties, most British research has concentrated on either national or local organisation. Basic information about the intermediate level, the Labour Party's regional organisation and the Conservative Party's area structure, is not readily available. Robert McKenzie acknowledged in his own study of British parties that his prime concern was with "the distribution of power in the Conservative and Labour Parties at the national level; the regional and local organisations of the two parties are, therefore, dealt with more briefly". (2) Jean Blondel has also written: "The eleven regions of the Labour Party and the twelve areas of the Conservative Party are rarely examined". (3) This thesis sets out to fill the gap.

The literature on British political parties may be classified into three groups. Inevitably any classification is rather arbitrary and the three selected categories are certainly not mutually exclusive. The first category consists of historical material on parties. Indeed, most studies of

1. L.D. Epstein, Political Parties in Western Democracies. London, 1967, p.3.

2. R.T. McKenzie, British Political Parties. (Second Edition). London, 1967, p.231.

3. J. Blondel, Voters, Parties and Leaders. Harmondsworth, 1963, p.108.

British political parties have been descriptive historical analyses of the origins and development of parties or, alternatively, of significant periods in their history. Secondly, a major sector of the literature has focussed upon the internal power structures of the Labour and Conservative Parties. The third category delineated in this classification consists of the rapidly expanding literature on local parties.

The work at the turn of the century by M. Ostrogorski (1) and A.L. Lowell (2) provides some useful historical perspectives on the nature of nineteenth century party organisation. They produced detailed accounts of the development of party organisation and changes in the party system caused by the extension of the franchise. Ostrogorski was particularly concerned with the caucus in England which he felt was basically undemocratic, leading to corruption and oligarchy. Recent research by J. Cornford, (3) E. Feuchtwanger (4) and R. Blake (5) has further elaborated the development of Conservative Party organisation. A major study by J.R. Vincent on the formation of the Liberal Party includes sections on party organisation. (6) On the Labour side important contributions

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1. M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties. London, 1902 (2 volumes).
 2. A.L. Lowell, The Government of England. New York, 1908 (2 volumes).
 3. J. Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century", Victorian Studies. Volume VII, 1963, p.41.
 4. E. Feuchtwanger, DIsraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party. London, 1968.
 5. R. Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill. London, 1968.
 6. J.R. Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party. London, 1966.

to the analysis of early party organisation have been made by G.D.H. Cole,(1) H. Pelling(2) and F. Bealey(3).

In the second category the most important contribution has been by R.T. McKenzie who has examined in detail the distribution of power in the Labour and Conservative parties. He concluded that despite their very different origins, traditions and formal structures, power in both parties is concentrated in the parliamentary parties, particularly the respective leaderships.(4) McKenzie followed many of the hypotheses established by R. Michels in his book Political Parties (New York, 1966). Michels set out to demonstrate that in all large organisations the advent of democracy was impossible. Basing his research primarily on the German Social Democratic Party, he displayed the oligarchical, undemocratic nature of party organisation. Martin Harrison's study Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945 provides an analysis of the role of the trade union movement within the Labour Party's power structure.(5) Valuable information about party organisation can be found in the Nuffield General

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1. G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914. London, 1941.
 2. H. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party. London, 1965.
 3. F. Bealey and H. Pelling, Labour and Politics, 1900-1906. London, 1958.
 4. R.T. McKenzie, op. cit., 1967.
 5. M. Harrison, Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945. London, 1960.

Election studies. For example, the analysis of the 1970 General Election by David Butler and Michael Pinto-Duschinsky contains a detailed discussion of party activity at both national and local level.(1) Research on the selection of parliamentary candidates has also provided some useful insights into the nature of constituency organisation.(2)

Much recent research into political parties has focussed on particular aspects of local politics. A great deal of material on constituency parties, candidate selection and local party bureaucrats has emanated from this third category. In 1959 A.H. Birch edited a study of politics in Glossop which included an examination of the political parties in the town.(3) Some years later Frank Bealey published a study of local politics in Newcastle-under-Lyme which provided some interesting perspectives on a local political system.(4) Two studies of borough politics produced in the 1960's have also been particularly informative, namely, Voting in Cities: the 1964 Borough elections (5) and Borough Politics.(6) Further studies of

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1. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, The British General Election of 1970. London, 1971.
 2. See, for example; A. Ranney, Pathways to Parliament. London, 1965; M. Rush, The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates, London, 1969; and P. Paterson, The Selectorate. London, 1967.
 3. A.H. Birch, Small Town Politics. London, 1959.
 4. F. Bealey, et.al. Constituency Politics. London, 1965.
 5. L.J. Sharpe, Voting in Cities: The 1964 Borough Elections. London, 1967.
 6. G.W. Jones, Borough Politics. London, 1969

local politics have been written by E.G. Janosik (1) and Ian Budge.(2) There are useful accounts of constituency electioneering in recent studies by Holt and Turner (3) and by Denis Kavanagh.(4) Two brief studies of local party agents by G.O. Comfort (5) and A. Pawcett (6) are sources of information on constituency party organisation. Somewhat later, in 1970, an important study on the size and composition of local party membership was published (7) and an interesting, if heavily criticised, study of the Liverpool Labour Party was published the following year.(8)

This discussion of the literature on British political parties has been extremely selective. It has focussed on the work most relevant to this study of party organisation. There has been no attempt to cover the massive literature on political socialisation and related subjects. It is, however, worth mentioning political culture as an approach to study since many American and Scandinavian studies have focussed on this analytical concept in their attempts to explain the development

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1. E.G. Janosik, Constituency Labour Parties in Britain. London, 1968.
 2. I. Budge, et.al., Political Stratification and Democracy. London, 1972.
 3. R.T. Holt and J.E. Turner, The Battle of Barons Court. London, 1968.
 4. D. Kavanagh, Constituency Electioneering in Britain. London, 1968.
 5. G.O. Comfort, Professional Politicians: A Study of British Party Agents. Washington D.C., 1958.
 6. A. Pawcett, Conservative Agent. London, 1967.
 7. D. Berry, The Sociology of Grass Roots Politics: A Study of Party Membership. London, 1970.
 8. B. Hindess, The Decline of Working Class Politics. London, 1971. For a penetrating critique of this book see, R. Baxter, "The Working Class and Labour Politics" in Political Studies. March 1972, pp.97-107.

and functioning of political parties.(1) Political culture is essentially a "shorthand expression to denote the emotional and attitudinal environment within which the political system operates."(2) The cultural, or environmental, approach to analysis has been in vogue during the last two decades. It is worth tapping the political culture approach for two reasons. One is that the citizens' attitudes to the political system affect the kinds of demands that are made and the ways they are expressed. According to Almond and Powell:

"The kinds of orientations which exist in a population will have a significant influence on the ways in which the political system works. The demands made upon the system, the responses to laws and appeals for support, and the conduct of individuals in their political roles, will all be shaped by the common orientation patterns,"(3)

The political culture approach helps one to describe and analyse the interactions between the political system and its culture.

A second reason is that, by examining the relationship between the political culture and the outputs of the political system, one is better able to appreciate means by which political change may be effected.(4) Political culture is, therefore, a useful analytical tool. Possibly, however, as Kavanagh has observed, "The fatal attractiveness of the political culture approach is that it may be made to explain too

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1. See for example, L.D. Epstein, op.cit., and H. Rokkan and S.M. Lipset, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives, New York and London, 1967.
 2. D. Kavanagh, Political Culture, London, 1972, p.10.
 3. G.A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr., Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach, Boston, 1966, p.50.
 4. This follows D. Kavanagh, Political Culture, London, 1972, p.13.

much".(1) According to LaPalombara:

"There is more than a little truth to Sartori's complaint that systems theorists, functionalists or otherwise, have taken politics out of political science and have obscured the critically important fact that political institutions and political leaders constitute independent factors that manage to shape not merely the environment and some of the ecological factors but the operation and development of the political system (or parts thereof) itself."(2)

The literature on British political parties is extensive, but, perhaps inevitably, most studies are limited in their scope. The most comprehensive analysis of the Labour and Conservative Parties is by R.T. McKenzie,(3) but there still remain many gaps in our knowledge of British parties which need to be filled. One such gap is the intermediate level in each party, the Labour Party's regional organisation and the Conservative Party's area organisation.

2. The Framework of Analysis

This thesis is a study of party organisation. It shows both the Conservative and Labour Parties as exemplifying some of the complexities of power and influence evident in any large organisation which is part bureaucracy and part a voluntary association. The particular focus of this research is the intermediate level of organisation in each party, namely the Labour Party's regional organisation and the Conservative Party's area structure. The work of the regional bureaucrats

1. *ibid*, p.55.

2. J. LaPalombara, "Parsimony and Empiricism in Comparative Politics: An Anti-Scholaristic View" in The Methodology of Comparative Research, edited by R.T. Holt and J.E. Turner, New York, 1970, p.132.

3. R.T. McKenzie, *op.cit*.

in the two parties is examined in detail along with the organisational relationships which this level enjoys with national, constituency and city units. In analysing the work of regional organisers and area agents the thesis challenges traditional academic wisdom concerning the level of centralisation in the Labour and Conservative Parties.(1)

Both the Labour and Conservative Parties have established networks of regional offices in Britain. The Labour Party has eleven regional offices in the three home countries while the Conservative Party has eleven area offices in England and Wales (see page 24). Regional and area bureaucrats operate at an intermediate level, between the national party machine on the one hand and constituency associations on the other. They are employed by the centre and act as the "eyes and ears" or the "listening posts" of their respective leaderships, providing detailed information on constituency and local party matters for headquarters. They are also involved in servicing constituency and local parties, a task which assumes particular importance when a local unit is both politically marginal and poorly organised. In short, regional organisers and area

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1. Traditional wisdom concerning the degree of centralisation in the Labour and Conservative Parties is exemplified in, for example: M. Ostrogorski, *op.cit*; A.L. Lowell, *op.cit*.; J.K. Pollock, "British Party Organisation" in Political Science Quarterly, Vol.XLVI, 1930; R.T. McKenzie, *op.cit*.; To date the major critique of this view has come from Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, The Role of Constituency Associations in the Conservative Party, Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford, 1972, but this analysis is obviously restricted to the Conservative Party. See also, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, "Central Office and Power in the Conservative Party", Political Studies, Volume XX, March, 1972.

agents exist to serve others: either the national party machine or constituency parties. A central proposition of this thesis is that both regional organisers and area agents act as the field administrative agents of their respective head offices. The relationship between the head office bureaucrats and those in the regions may be termed centralised. Most important organisational initiatives are taken nationally; regional organisers and area agents work under the close supervision of the centre.

The major reason for the development and maintenance of a field administrative network in both parties appears to be administrative convenience. The centralised relationship which exists between the head offices and their regional staff is very much in line with traditional thinking about British political parties. This theme of centralised parties with powerful leaderships and relatively weak local party units has been prominent in most studies from the turn of the century onwards. According to Ostrogorski:

.... without even resorting to much wire-pulling, the (Conservative) Central Office ensures the organisation of the party a complete unity of management which makes all the threads converge in the London office..... Possessing the reality of power, the Organisation of the leaders looks on that of the popular (National) Union as harmless and as even serving the purpose of a safety valve to let off the gas.(1)

Lowell's view, a few years later, was very similar:

Both the Conservative and Liberal organisations are shams, but with this difference, that the Conservative organisation is a transparent, and the Liberal an opaque, sham.(2)

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1. M. Ostrogorski, op.cit., p.526, 27.
 2. A.L. Lowell, op.cit., p.578.

In 1930 J.K. Pollock wrote:

Political organisation in Britain has become more mechanical, more controlled from the centre... the leader of the party holds the power.... The organisation is his tool and it responds to his deliberations.(1)

In his study of British parties R.T. McKenzie observed that:

Central Office is in effect the "personal machine" of the Leader.... It would be difficult to envisage a more tight-knit system of oligarchical control of the affairs of a political party.... The party bureaucracy, responsible only to the leader of the Party, is just as fully in control of the affairs of the Party as it was in the heyday of Captain Middleton sixty years ago.(2)

Again, to quote McKenzie:

No emphasis on the auxiliary functions of the mass organisations outside Parliament can be allowed to obscure the basic proposition that the mass parties are primarily the servants of their respective parliamentary parties; that their principal function is to sustain teams of parliamentary leaders between whom the electorate is periodically invited to choose.(3)

Austin Ranney has put forward a similar interpretation:

British constituency parties are not local in the same sense as American State and local parties. They are manned by activists primarily loyal to the national parties' leaders and causes. Each is established for an essentially national purpose, to elect a Member of Parliament. Everything else is subordinate to that purpose.(4)

Almost without exception commentaries on British politics have stressed the strength of the respective party leaderships. The major function of local parties is seen to be one of acting as an electoral agent for the national party machines. This widely held viewpoint tends to exaggerate the degree of centralisation inherent in both the Labour and Conservative Parties. It is argued in this study that while regional

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1. J.K. Pollock, op.cit., p.180.
 2. R.T. McKenzie, op.cit., pp. 17, 291 (McKenzie's italics).
 3. *ibid*, p.647.
 4. A. Ranney, op.cit., p.281.

organisers and area agents enjoy a centralised relationship with their respective head office, constituency parties are not obliged to follow directives issued by regional or area staff. There are, however, some exceptions to this general rule, notably in the Labour Party, which will be outlined in the thesis.

The deeply-rooted theme of centralisation, implicit in most studies of British parties, is not unambiguous. The term centralisation itself poses many problems of analysis. As de Tocqueville wrote in his classic, Democracy in America, "Centralisation is a word in general and daily use, without any precise meaning being attached to it"(1). This study utilises the concepts of centralisation and decentralisation quite frequently. It is therefore important to provide some clarification at the outset.

Centralisation and decentralisation are, firstly, terms which describe the nature of the relationship between local units of government and the central authorities in the capital city; this may be referred to as territorial centralisation or decentralisation. Secondly, the words can also refer to the nature of political relations within a single unit of government; this is frequently known as hierarchic centralisation or decentralisation. Here the important dimensional setting is not geographic; the basic problem is the distribution of authority among the various levels. At a wider level of analysis "centralisation", "administrative centralisation" and

1. A. de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, (Mentor Edition), New York, 1956, p.63.

their opposites are often used to characterise the distribution of power within a capital city. In this sense centralisation could mean one of the following: (a) the growth of bureaucratic power at the expense of democratic power; (b) possession of substantial power by the top levels of an administrative hierarchy; (c) an expanded role for the central specialised agencies for personnel, purchasing, and budgeting, at the expense of the programme-administering executive departments.(1)

There are numerous problems associated with the use of centralisation as an analytical concept. The whole area of centralisation and decentralisation has largely been avoided by political scientists. When the issue is discussed the virtues of decentralisation and the drawbacks of centralisation are almost always emphasised. A.H. Hanson has observed: "The word decentralisation usually produces favourable reactions. Centralisation is associated with delay, red tape, and the erosion of local liberties; decentralisation with speed, initiative and grass roots participation in the decision-making process."(2) The subject has often been dealt with emotionally rather than scientifically (3) and centralisation has become a word with rather sinister connotations. Nevertheless, many

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1. J.W. Fesler, "Centralisation and Decentralisation" in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. New York, 1968.
 2. A.H. Hanson, "Decentralization" in Planning and the Politicians. London, 1969, p.104.
 3. The major exception here is the work of J.W. Fesler, for example, "Approaches to the understanding of decentralisation" in The Journal of Politics. Vol.27, 1965. (See Bibliography for a full list of Fesler's writings.)

of the prejudices which exist against centralised political systems are without foundation as, for example, J.G. Bulpitt and J.W. Peeler have indicated.(1)

One difficulty is that much of the best work on centralisation and decentralisation is in the form of monographs, focussing on a single country or agency.(2) Very little of the empirical evidence recorded in these studies has been synthesised. A further characteristic of the work on centralisation is what J.W. Peeler has called "the distinctness of several literatures, the result of which is that the relevancy of each to the other is largely neglected".(3) The literature on any one country rarely relates to findings in similar studies of other countries.

Peeler argues that centralisation and decentralisation are best regarded as opposite tendencies on a single continuum whose poles are beyond the range of any real political system. Total decentralisation would, according to Peeler, require the withering away of the state, whereas total centralisation would imperil the state's capacity to perform its functions. Given such a continuum it is then argued that it is possible to compare political or administrative systems. Again, Peeler

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1. J.G. Bulpitt, "Participation and Local Government: Territorial Democracy" in Participation and Politics, edited by O. Parry, Manchester, 1972; J.W. Peeler, "The Political Role of Field Administration" in P. Heady and S.L. Stokes, Papers in Comparative Public Administration, New York, 1962.
 2. See, for example, R.C. Fried, The Italian Prefects, Yale, 1963, and H. Jacob, German Administration since Bismarck, Yale, 1963.
 3. J.W. Peeler, "Centralisation and Decentralisation" *op.cit.*, p.376.

suggests that it should also be possible to characterise any single system over a given time period as moving toward one or other pole.(1) This analysis is useful but it overlooks one major difficulty, namely that of measuring the degree of centralisation or decentralisation in any political system. It is relatively simple to produce generalisations but these are of limited utility. Often, in practice, central relations are too uneven and patchy to allow meaningful generalisations. For example, central authorities may treat certain areas very differently from the rest. "Further, the traditional tools used to measure centralisation and decentralisation have an excessive legalistic bias. For example, an ultra vires rule, a prefectoral system, grants-in-aid topping the magic 50 per cent, the loss of important functions, these factors, even when taken together, tell only part of the story and one which can be interpreted in different ways."(2)

The terms centralisation and decentralisation therefore pose problems of analysis for political scientists. They need to be used with great care. Decentralisation of workload by both Labour and Conservative Party head offices is a recurring theme in this thesis. It is important, however, to recognise that decentralisation of workload is not identical with the decentralisation of administrative and political power. To move workload out of the capital may be both efficient and convenient but it may not involve any decentralisation of either

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1. J.W. Fesler, "Centralisation and Decentralisation", op.cit., p.371.
 2. J.G. Bulpitt, op.cit., p.299.

administrative or political initiative. Indeed, the desire to shed workload while retaining administrative initiative at the centre has been a general characteristic of central - local relations in Britain. The Conservative and Labour Parties both reflect this tradition.

In this study it is argued that the large degree of control exercised by the respective head offices over their regional officials does not in itself establish that the two parties are highly centralised. There is no evidence to suggest that the chain of command from the centre extends beyond the regional and area bureaucrats to constituency parties. It is suggested that regional organisers and area agents cannot act as centralising agents for their parties because, although their own relationship with the centre is tightly controlled, they themselves lack any formal authority at either the constituency or local party levels. The concept of authority, however, like the related concepts of power and influence, is used in a variety of ways in political science. Clarification is essential.

Since the emergence of the social sciences authority has been the subject of research in a wide variety of empirical settings: the family, small groups, armies, and so on. The concept is also useful in analysing the nature of political parties. The major treatment of the concept of authority in the twentieth century was that carried out by Max Weber.⁽¹⁾ Weber distinguished between three pure types of authority: legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic. In the last two instances the obligation is to a person, the traditional chief

1. M. Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation. London, 1922.

or the heroic leader. Legal authority is more restricted in scope; obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal network of positions. Weber's treatment of legal-rational authority, which distinguishes between but does not elaborate on authority inherent in office and authority based on technical knowledge, provides the basic framework for most contemporary analyses of bureaucracy.

Political and social scientists, however, are by no means agreed on how the concept of authority should be used. For example, Michels defines authority as "the capacity, innate or acquired, for exercising ascendancy over a group." (1) Bierstedt, however, takes issue with each of these points, arguing that authority is not a capacity; it is a relationship. Furthermore, it is neither innate, nor a matter of exercising ascendancy. Bierstedt considers that Michels has confused authority with competence. Yet both agree on the close relationship between authority and power. For Michels, "authority is a manifestation of power"; (2) for Bierstedt, "authority becomes a power phenomenon.... it is sanctioned power, institutionalised power," (3)

Contemporary political science is no less confused. Thus Lasswell and Kaplan define authority as "formal power". (4)

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1. R. Michels, "Authority" in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences. New York, 1930, p.319.
 2. *ibid*, p.319
 3. R. Bierstedt, "The Problem of Authority" in M. Berger, et al (editors), Freedom and Control in Modern Society. New York, 1954, pp.79,80.
 4. H.D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry. London, 1950, p.133.

Friedrich, however, explicitly rejects this notion and defines authority as "the quality of communication", which is "capable of reasoned elaboration".(1) They are also in disagreement as to whether power or influence is the more inclusive term. Lasswell and Kaplan argue that "power is a form of influence"(2) while Friedrich maintains that "influence is a kind of power, indirect and unstructured".(3) It is of little value to pursue a definition of authority as a special type of power and influence since political scientists have not yet formulated a widely accepted operational definition of power.

The notion of power is frequently talked about without any precise meaning being attached to it. Traditionally, political theorists have taken it for granted that key terms like power, influence and authority need no great elaboration. Where they are used there is little consistency in applying them to particular situations. Perhaps the closest equivalent to the power relationship is the causal relationship. For the assertion "C" has power over "R", one can substitute the assertion, "C's behaviour causes R's behaviour". Provided one can define the causal relationship, one can define influence, power, or authority, and vice versa.(4) Yet this approach runs into the same difficulties that have plagued

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1. C.J. Friedrich, Man and His Government: An Empirical Theory of Politics. New York, 1963. (see chapters 9-13).
 2. H.D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, op.cit., p.85.
 3. C.J. Friedrich, op.cit., p.199.
 4. H.A. Simon, Models of Man. New York, 1957.

efforts to distinguish true from spurious causal relations.

Until recently the whole approach to the analysis of power was somewhat speculative: there were a good many impressionistic works but few systematic empirical studies of power relations. While the attempt to understand political systems by analysing power relations is ancient, the systematic study of power relations is relatively new.(1) The only common factor in studies of power, influence and authority is confusion.

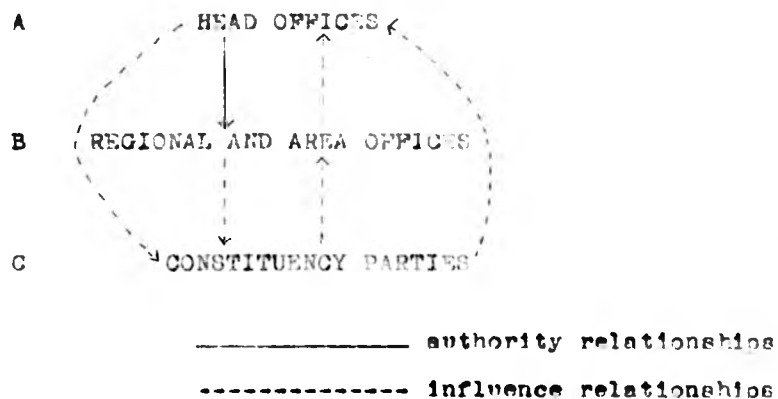
It is suggested in this study that regional organisers and area agents lack authority at the constituency and local party levels. Authority in this sense means little other than formal power or institutionalised power. The close relationship between authority and power is very evident. For Lasswell and Kaplan, "political science, as an empirical discipline, is the study of the shaping and sharing of power."(2) Whether or not one adopts this extreme view of the importance of power, power relations are certainly one feature of politics among a number of others, and as such merit examination. Perhaps, as suggested earlier, the most useful equivalent to the power relation in the context of this study is the causal relation. For the assertion "A has power over B," one can substitute the assertion, "A's behaviour causes B's behaviour." In the context of this analysis of

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1. See the massive literature on Community Power in American Cities. The alternative approaches and general confusion in these studies is indicative of the confusion in the area of power relations in politics.
 2. E.D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, op.cit., p.xiv.

party organisation, influence may be understood as an indirect and unstructured kind of power relying largely on informal rather than formal relationships.

While this thesis argues that the well-established notion of two highly centralised parties is in need of modification, the precise relationships between the various organisational levels are complex and prohibit the formulation of a simple analytical model. For example, the relationship of regional and area staff to their respective head offices is very different from that of regional and area staff to constituency party units.⁽¹⁾ Figure A provides a pictorial analysis of the relationship:

FIGURE A



The only "authority" relationship in the model outlined above is that between the respective head offices and their

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1. Constituency parties, in this context, are the official party organisations in each Parliamentary constituency. In both parties they elect their own officers and adopt their own candidates for Parliamentary elections. Usually each constituency party raises and administers its own funds, owns or rents its offices and conducts its own local publicity and propaganda for the party. On occasions constituency parties also employ a full-time agent.

regional staffs. There is no chain of command from the party leaderships to constituency and branch levels via the regional and area bureaucrats. The chain of command from the centre ends at the regional level. There are, on occasions, it is true, direct links between the centre and the constituencies (such as, for example, at annual party conferences and on national committees) but here, given the relative autonomy of constituency parties, the relationship tends to be one of two-way influence rather than of the imposition of authority by the central party organisation. Constituency parties are voluntary associations, not always amenable to pressure from head office, whether or not it comes via the regional or area organiser. While the relationship of regional organisers and area agents with their respective head offices is centralised, the voluntary nature of constituency parties often makes it very difficult for regional and area organisers to exert influence, let alone authority, at the local level.

The argument has already been proposed that regional organisers and area agents act as the field administrative agents of their respective leaderships. The term field administration is used widely in this study and calls for some explanation.

The term is used to designate a government's or agency's administrative operations outside its national headquarters. On the whole, in Europe, the term field administration is often held to be synonymous with that of "prefect" and all the peculiar practices which were, and still are, supposed to be inherent in that office, but this is a very narrow way

of looking at these agencies. Today field administrators carry out a wide variety of tasks. According to R.C. Fried three types of field administration can be distinguished: the functional and two prefectorial varieties which are differentiated according to whether or not the chief executive in the field commands a closely integrated system of decentralised administration. Fried uses the concepts of integrated and unintegrated prefectorial systems.(1)

In a functional system of field administration the field agents of the central administration are part of separate functional hierarchies responsible for relatively distinct aspects of government policy. Lines of communication run direct between departmental headquarters and their agents in the field, and the field agents are directly responsible to their superiors at the centre. The geographical units which they use are not necessarily shared by any other functional agencies or by local government. In describing the integrated prefectorial system the term "integrated" refers to a dual relationship in the prefectorial system: between the prefect and the other field officers of the central government, and between the prefect and local government. In principle the prefect is the senior government officer in the prefecture and the officers of individual ministries are responsible to him. The prefect is part of a chain of command between headquarters and the field for all government services, whether they be administrative or technical. Delegation of authority from ministries is made to the prefects rather than to ministerial

1. R.C. Fried, op.cit., 1963.

representatives. In the unintegrated system the prefect is head of a territory which no field service of the central government uses. There is no set of "master" regions for all the functions of government. The prefecture is but one channel of communication between the field and the capital. Each specialist functionary in the field maintains independent links with headquarters. The prefect has no overriding authority over their operations.

These categories are inevitably rather arbitrary and they do emphasise structural rather than behavioural elements. Nevertheless they facilitate a measure of comparison. From a historical perspective field administration has been used as a tool for both the centralisation and decentralisation of government. It is always difficult to disentangle the motives, or for that matter the results, of the growth of field services. To some degree the centralising factor, so conspicuous in the modern origins of field administration, persists, often with an emphasis upon the supervision of local units of government. At the other extreme is a conscious effort by national governments to permit adaptation of administration to the needs and aspirations of particular regions, in other words to decentralise the execution of policies that must be formulated nationally. A third, and possibly the most important, factor in the growth of field organisation has simply been the need to get particular functions performed, with all conscious theorising about both centralisation and decentralisation pushed aside.(1)

It is suggested in this thesis that in both the Labour and Conservative Parties administrative expediency, rather

1. J.W. Fesler, "Field Organisation" in F.M. Marx, Elements of Public Administration. New Jersey, 1959.

than any excessive zeal for intra-party democracy, has very largely accounted for the development of regional and area units; it has also been an important factor in explaining their maintenance and expansion. It is difficult to categorise regional and area staff on the basis of the above models. Regional organisers and area agents are geographically based; they are generalists rather than functional specialists. At the same time they enjoy a hierarchic relationship with their head offices, acting as the agents of the respective party leaderships and fulfilling a wide variety of tasks on their behalf. There are, of course, differences between the two parties which will be examined. It is argued in this study that regional and area staff exist to serve others. On the one hand they are employed by, and work for, the national party organisations; on the other hand they service constituency and local parties. The relationships between the various levels in the two parties are complex and merit close examination.

3. The Regions

This study sets out to analyse the work of regional organisers and area agents and to discuss the nature of the relationships between this level and the other organisational levels within each party. The thesis proceeds by focussing in depth on three regions: the North West, the West Midlands and the East Midlands. Ideally, of course, the research would have examined each area and each region, but constraints of time and finance made this an impossible task. In selecting the three regions and areas for study no attempt was made to

find typical regions because it seems unlikely that such regions exist. In this study the aim has been to locate regions in which this level of party organisation could be conveniently and fruitfully studied. Three case studies were finally selected: the North West region, the West Midlands region and the East Midlands region. The material obtained from these regions and areas has enabled some generalisations to be made about party organisation at this level in England up until 1971.(1) This research concentrates largely on the three regions outlined above and thereby necessitates some discussion of the major social and political characteristics of these regions.

(1) The North West.

In 1971 both the Labour and Conservative Parties incorporated 79 constituencies in their respective regional units in the North West. Their regional boundaries were almost identical, both including the whole of Lancashire and Cheshire. The only boundary differences between the two parties concerned the Westmorland and High Peak constituencies. The Labour Party included High Peak in its North West region, while the Conservatives included Westmorland but not the High Peak.

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1. The thesis focusses on England, not Scotland or Wales. Information about Scotland and Wales is utilised only to put the development of English regional and area organisation into perspective. The analysis ends in 1971 although there are occasional references to later periods.

In 1971 the Labour and Conservative Parties divided the country up into the following regions (Labour) and areas (Conservative):

Conservative Party areas: Greater London (103 constituencies), Northern (34), North West (79), Yorkshire (54), East Midlands (42), East (40), West Midlands (60), South East (34), Wessex (37), Western (28), Wales (36).

Labour Party regions: Greater London (100 constituencies), Northern (38), North West (79), Yorkshire (51), East Midlands (40), West Midlands (54), Eastern (42), South Western (43), Southern (64), Wales (36), Scotland (71).

In the North West, religion had a substantial influence on politics throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the nineteenth century Roman Catholics in West Lancashire traditionally supported the Liberals and, since the majority of the population was Protestant, this led to increased Protestant support for the Conservatives. The division between West Lancashire, with its Protestant-Roman Catholic split and numerous Conservative M.P.'s, and East Lancashire, with fewer Roman Catholics and fewer Conservative M.P.'s, was a feature of elections in Lancashire until 1924. As late as the 1923 General Election there was a clear division between the two areas. The working class Conservative vote, a feature of Lancashire politics, had its origins in the Irish Question in the nineteenth century.

In the elections of 1906 and 1910 the North West behaved distinctively. The swing away from Unionism was greater than elsewhere largely because Free Trade was felt to be essential for the future of the region's two staple industries, coal and cotton. Even in 1906, however, with the Unionist Party losing some 250 seats nationally, West Lancashire remained an area of substantial Unionist strength.

In the early years of the twentieth century the electoral agreement between the Liberal and Labour Parties was more effective in this region than elsewhere. The Liberal Party had traditionally been weak in the North West and therefore was relatively willing to engage in electoral agreements with the new Labour Party. Nevertheless, the rise of the Labour Party in the twentieth century was restrained by the strength of urban Conservatism in Lancashire and Cheshire.

In 1929 most industrial seats won by the Liberals in 1923 were transferred to the Labour Party. Nationally the party polled over eight million votes and won 287 seats in the House of Commons. Only in East Lancashire was the Labour Party unable to gain the majority of former Liberal seats. In East Lancashire the Liberals remained stronger than in many other parts of the country. The relative political stability of East Lancashire is also shown by the fact that the Conservatives won several predominantly working class seats there as late as 1959.(1)

Since 1955, however, there has been a steady swing to the Labour Party in the North West. Yet, as observed above, the region is so large and diverse that one must sub-divide it in order to provide a meaningful analysis. In the 1970 General Election, for example, a fairly average regional swing concealed two quite distinct areas. In the 18 seats around Merseyside the swing was only half the national average at 2.5%. As in Scotland, this represented a cumulative trend to Labour. Since 1955 these seats have had an 8.5% swing to Labour. In the textile towns of Lancashire, however, the 1966-1970 swing to the Conservatives was 7.4%, three times that on Merseyside. The movement to the right is in sharp contrast with the above average Labour swings which this area had shown in 1959, 1964, and 1966. In overall terms, however, the net swing in the region has been to Labour since 1955. Following the 1970 General Election, the North West standard region (which includes Lancashire, Cheshire and the High Peak) was represented by 38 Conservative and 41 Labour M.P.'s. Within

1. M. Kinnear, The British Voter. New York, 1968, p.48.

this region the South East Lancashire conurbation returned 11 Conservatives and 18 Labour members; Merseyside returned 6 Conservatives and 9 Labour members. The rest of the region returned 24 Conservatives and 9 Labour members. As a whole, therefore, the North West region appears to be finely balanced politically.(1)

(11) The West Midlands

Central government planners have split the Midlands into two regions, East and West. The Labour and Conservative Parties have done likewise. The Labour Party included 54 constituencies in its West Midland region in 1971 while the Conservative Party incorporated 60 constituencies in its West Midlands area. Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the City of Birmingham were common to both parties. In addition the Conservatives included the county of Gloucestershire, excluding Bristol. In total the West Midlands region contains over five million people, that is, about 9 per cent of the country's total population. About half of them live and work in the conurbation of Birmingham and the Black Country, a belt 20 miles long and about twelve miles wide. Birmingham, with a population of over one million, is the largest city outside London.

In 1886 the West Midlands, led by Joseph Chamberlain, deserted its long Liberal tradition, never to return. The

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1. Useful background material on the North West in the early twentieth century is contained in:
R. Churchill, Lord Derby's King of Lancashire. London, 1959.
S. Salvidge, Salvidge of Liverpool. London, 1934.
P. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism. London, 1971.

only parts of the West Midlands to show Liberal strength thereafter were the Potteries, and also the Black Country just west of Birmingham.(1) It is impossible to explain politics in the West Midlands region without reference to Joseph Chamberlain and his efforts at caucus government in Birmingham. Numerous Liberals left their party, at least ostensibly, over Irish Home Rule, and even some of those remaining had doubts about the wisdom of granting Home Rule. With the support of the Birmingham Liberal Association Chamberlain allied himself with the Conservatives in 1886 on the issue of retaining the Union with Ireland. Chamberlain had a free hand in organising Liberal Unionism not only in Birmingham but throughout the three counties of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. In Birmingham itself Radical Unionism soon became deeply rooted, but Chamberlain's direct influence was much less in the Black Country than in Birmingham, and beyond these two areas, hardly of noticeable significance.(2)

The strength of Chamberlain and the Unionist tradition in Birmingham posed difficulties for the emergent Labour Party. Chamberlain's support extended to the rank and file of the trade unions, though most union leaders were Liberals. Even as late as 1911 the Birmingham Labour Representation Council felt it necessary to restrict its activity. The Labour Party's National Agent could find no reason for Labour candidates' poor showing at Birmingham East in January 1910 other

1. M. Kinnear, *op.cit.*, p.16.

2. M.C. Hurst, Joseph Chamberlain and West Midlands Politics 1886-1895. Stratford-on-Avon, The Dugdale Society, 1962.

than "the Birmingham spirit". As Pelling has observed:

"The tradition of small-scale industrial enterprise, and the highly localised and on the whole friendly industrial relations that this tradition fostered, stood in the way of the assimilation of the West Midlands to the national pattern of political evolution. Indeed, it was not until 1945 that the Labour Party made such a breakthrough in Birmingham politics that it could at last be said that the local peculiarities, of which Joseph Chamberlain was in part the symbol, in part the count, really seemed to have faded away." (1)

In the 1945 General Election there was a swing to the Labour Party in the order of 20%, a long awaited success for the party. From 1955 to 1970 there was a small overall swing to the Conservative Party in the West Midlands standard region of 1.9%. In the 1970 General Election there was a net swing to the Conservative Party of 4.7%. Within the region, however, one area swung disproportionately to the Conservatives. In the six constituencies partly or wholly in the Black Country boroughs of Dudley and Wolverhampton the swing of 9% to the Conservatives was nearly twice the national average. This large swing followed pro-Conservative trends at previous elections. The swing to the Conservative Party between 1955 and 1970 was 9.6% in the Dudley-Wolverhampton area. Joseph Chamberlain may have put his stamp on West Midlands politics, but by 1970 the region had found another hero, Enoch Powell.

It was on 20th April, 1968, that Powell made his first major speech on immigration. On the following day Heath dismissed Powell from the shadow cabinet. Since this speech in Birmingham the immigration issue has never been far below the surface, particularly in the West Midlands. Although its precise importance is disputed (2) Powell's popularity at the

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1. H. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910 London, 1967, p.203.
 2. D.E. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, op.cit., appendix 2, p.386.

constituency level in the West Midlands appears extensive. In the 1970 General Election the West Midlands standard region, incorporating Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire, returned 30 Conservative and 24 Labour Members. Within the region, the conurbation round Birmingham returned 12 Conservatives and 15 Labour Members while the rest of the region returned 18 Conservative and 9 Labour Members. The precise degree of Powell's influence may be disputed, but his presence is very much in evidence.

(111) The East Midlands

The East Midlands region may well be described as England's forgotten region, under the shadow of its more assertive neighbour to the west. The region certainly does not hang together; it lacks the focus which the Birmingham conurbation provides for the West Midlands. Despite its diversity both the planners and the political parties treat the East Midlands, with its 3.4 million inhabitants, as an administrative whole. In 1971 the Labour Party incorporated 40 constituencies in its East Midlands region, while the Conservatives included 42 constituencies in its East Midlands area. Both parties included the counties of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire. The Conservative Party's two additional constituencies were the High Peak and Peterborough.

There are five county boroughs in the East Midlands region, Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton and Nottingham. None of these is large enough to provide a natural capital for the region. Indeed, the East Midlands can be neatly divided into

four sub-regions: firstly, the big industrial and mining complex of Nottingham and Derbyshire; secondly, Leicester and the industrial areas of Leicestershire, including the West Leicestershire coalfield; thirdly, Northamptonshire, with its traditional industries and its contemporary problems of expansion; fourthly, the Eastern lowlands, the agricultural area covering Holland, Kesteven, Rutland and parts of Leicestershire. There is no natural centre, rather a scattering of towns and villages throughout the region.

The East Midlands region has been marked by, on the one hand, the strength of nonconformity in both middle and working-class electors and, on the other hand, the weakness of the Labour Party as an effective political force, whether among the miners, or among the hosiery, lace and boot and shoe workers, or among the agricultural labourers. In the 1860's Liberalism was the dominant creed in the East Midlands. Taking England as a whole, only the North England region was more Liberal in 1885. By 1910, however, the East Midlands was less Liberal than four or five other English regions, a change mostly due to middle-class electors, who no longer felt the pull of nonconformity in politics, going over from Liberalism to Unionism. By 1910 there were three Labour Members of Parliament representing constituencies in the region but, considering the fact that there was such a large agricultural element in the East Midlands region, its comparative loyalty to Liberalism was quite remarkable.(1)

1. H. Pelling, op.cit., (1967), pp.227,228.

The Labour Party won many mining seats in every election from 1918 to 1935, but the East Midlands was no pacemaker. In 1931 mining constituencies in Derbyshire voted for the National Government rather than the Labour Party. In Derbyshire the Liberals maintained connections with the Labour movement during the 1920's. In Chesterfield the Liberal, Barnett Kenyon, received the support of the miners in the elections of 1918 and 1922.⁽¹⁾ Even in 1923 and 1924 Kenyon defeated Labour candidates. A Liberal had won North-east Derbyshire in 1918, and the Liberals remained strong there in other elections in the 1920's. In Derbyshire several National Government victories in mining seats were probably due to vestigial Liberal support among miners.

It was only very gradually that the Labour Party began to gain seats in the East Midlands. By 1945 the mining and industrial constituencies in the region had fallen into line and returned Labour Members to the House of Commons. Since 1955 the East Midlands standard region, including Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire (less Peterborough), and Derbyshire (less the High Peak constituency), has showed an overall swing to the Conservative Party of 2.0%. The trend has been cumulative, but within the region there have been marked differences. In the Derby-Leicester area, for example, the swing to the Conservative Party since 1955 has been 3.2%, and in the 1970 General Election the twelve constituencies immediately adjoining Derby and Leicester averaged a 7.2% swing to the Conservatives. At the 1970 General

1. J.E. Williams, The Derbyshire Miners, London, 1962, pp.806-834.

General Election the Labour Party returned 19 of the region's Members of Parliament and the Conservative Party returned 16.

The three regions chosen for detailed study in this thesis provide many useful contrasts. Agricultural, industrial and suburban areas all feature in the analysis. Each region includes its representative sample of safe, marginal and hopeless constituencies. These factors enable meaningful generalisations to emerge about the nature of regional and area organisation in the Labour and Conservative Parties.

4. Organisation of Thesis

Chapter One examines the evolution of the Conservative Party's area organisation, tracing its origins from the late nineteenth century demands by the newly enfranchised urban leaders for some recognition of their electoral importance. Chapter Two looks at the more recent advent of the Labour Party's regional organisation. The need to provide some standardisation and to equip the party for electoral politics provided a stimulus for the Labour Party to employ a network of regional organisers. In both parties, however, it will be argued that the major reason for the emergence, and subsequent development, of intermediate party organisation was administrative expediency.

Chapter Three examines the relationship between regional and area organisers and their respective head offices. Regional/area reports and other documents provide the source material for this chapter which suggests that, within the nationally determined frameworks of action, both regional organisers and area agents are afforded some initiative.

Despite some differences in emphasis the chapter argues that both parties have a similar pattern; they both employ their regional staffs to act as the field agents for the respective leaderships.

A major focus of this study is the relationship between regional/area offices and constituency parties. Chapter Four provides a detailed account of the constituency/regional relationship in action. It examines the nature and extent of work in which both regional and area staff are involved at this level. Chapter Five follows on by providing a framework of analysis for the constituency/regional relationship. It discusses some of the most important factors determining the extent of regional and area intervention at the constituency level: the authority/influence of regional and area staff at the constituency level; the professionalism of local party organisation; the financial position of constituency parties. It also examines to what extent, if at all, interference from regional and area officials poses a threat to constituency party autonomy.

City parties are sufficiently distinct from constituency associations to merit separate examination. Chapter Six deals with the relationship between the city parties and the professional organisers at the regional and area level. Tensions between the city parties and regional/area officials often run deeper than those between regional/area offices and constituency parties. These tensions are far greater than simple personality differences; they have their origins in the rather uncertain constitutional position of the city and regional/area offices.

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This thesis is primarily concerned with examining the role of professional party bureaucrats at the regional and area level. "To carry out at least some of their duties regional and area staff must work with the democratic structure which exists at this level in both parties. It is argued in Chapter Seven that the democratic structures at the intermediate level in both parties are certainly influenced, if not controlled, by the regional and area organisers.

General Elections are, in many respects, the organisational climax to the work carried out at the regional and area level. Chapter Eight examines regional and area activity during the 1970 General Election. The relatively poor state of the Labour Party's constituency organisation necessitated far more detailed intervention than was needed in the Conservative Party. The usefulness of Conservative Party area staff during a General Election is open to question; Labour Party regional organisers appear to be used to a far greater degree than their Conservative counterparts.

The thesis concludes, in Chapter Nine, by providing some generalisations about the nature of regional and area party organisation in England. It discusses the problems of applying a single analytical model to the various regional relationships. It also outlines the major differences between the parties at the regional/area level. The importance of regional/area bureaucrats in the overall work of the Labour and Conservative Parties is also considered, along with the contribution which this study makes to contemporary political science.

There are three appendices to the thesis. Appendix A provides details of the formal framework of regional and area

organisation. Appendix E reproduces the questionnaire which was sent out to all regional organisers and area agents. This questionnaire provided much of the information contained in Appendix C which includes a brief portrait of the professional personnel at the regional and area level.

5. Documentation

Much of the information about regional and area organisation had to be obtained from primary sources, notably interviews and party documents. This reliance upon primary material was inevitable, given the lack of published work. The extensive archives at the regional and area offices were particularly useful, yet this source has hitherto been largely neglected by political scientists. A detailed discussion of the sources utilised in this paper is given in the Bibliography. In summary, they are:

- (a) Labour Party Regional Council Annual Reports:
 - North West Regional Council, 1939-1971.
 - West Midlands Regional Council, 1943-1971.
 - East Midlands Regional Council, 1945-1971.
- (b) Conservative Party Area Council Annual Reports:
 - West Midlands Area Council, 1887-1900, 1915-1971.
 - North West Area Council, Cheshire Division 1912-1925.
 - Lancashire Division 1912-1925.
 - North West Area Council Annual Reports, 1925-1971.
 - East Midlands Area Council, 1931-1971.
- (c) Labour Party Regional Council Minutes:
 - West Midlands Regional Council, 1969, 1970.
 - East Midlands Regional Council, 1966-1970.

- (d) Conservative Party Area Council Minutes:
 - West Midlands Area Council, Variety from 1886-1971.
 - North West Area Council, Variety from 1912-1971.
 - East Midlands Area Council, 1931-1971.
- (e) National Party Annual Reports:
 - The Conservative Party, 1880-1971.
 - The Labour Party, 1900-1971.
- (f) Journals on Party Organisation:
 - The Conservative Agents Journal, 1902-1971.
 - The Labour Organiser, 1920-1971.
- (g) Party rules and constitutions: National, regional and Area Levels.
- (h) Published and unpublished reports on party organisation.
- (i) Head Office circulars, 1970.
- (j) Published articles, books and newspaper articles.
- (k) Constituency, borough and city party reports, 1969-1971.
- (l) Questionnaires.

In addition, much valuable information has been obtained through interviews with national, regional and area officials. Party meetings at the regional and area level were also attended by the author between 1968 and 1971.

6. Summary

This study provides a detailed analysis of the work of Labour Party regional organisers and Conservative Party area agents. Any research that adds to our knowledge of political processes can be regarded as useful. Without some knowledge of regional and area organisation the overall picture of English party organisation is incomplete. The thesis focusses

upon the nature of work at the regional and area level and the relationship of regional and area officers with their respective head offices, constituencies and city parties. It is a central proposition of this study that both the Labour and Conservative Parties established this intermediate level primarily for reasons of administrative expediency; this has also been a dominant theme in the various reorganizations at the regional and area level.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EVOLUTION OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY AREA ORGANISATION

Nineteenth Century Origins

The Conservative Party's area structure was established primarily to provide convenient administrative units through which the leadership could supervise its extra-parliamentary organisation. It is argued in this study that the evolution of Conservative Party area organisation must be seen not only in the context of the decentralisation of a national party machine, but also as one element in the democratisation of party organisation. The Conservative Party's present area structure is the product of history; an account of its evolution is necessary in order to put the contemporary position into perspective.

The registration societies established after the 1832 Reform Act were the forerunners, but the 1867 Reform Act marked the advent of "democratic" party organisation in Britain. The 1867 Act, which almost doubled the number of voters,⁽¹⁾ along with the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872, provided a new stimulus to party organisation, particularly in the boroughs, where the increase in the electorate was about 140 per cent. To attract the newly enfranchised urban voters to the Conservative cause the National Union of Conservative and Constitutionalist Associations was formed in 1867. Three years later, in 1870, Conservative Central Office was established.

1. The 1867 Reform Act added 938,000 voters to an electorate of some 1,056,000 in England and Wales.

This strengthened central direction over what was still very much an atomised party organisation. J.W. Gorst, a barrister who represented Cambridge City in the House of Commons from 1866 to 1868, but who lost his seat in the 1868 General Election, was appointed Principal Agent of the Party. In 1871 Leonard Sedgwick, the Secretary of the National Union, retired and Gorst, along with his assistant, Major Charles Keith Falconer, replaced him as joint secretaries. Both the National Union and Central Office remained under the direction of the party leadership in these early years.

Between 1868 and 1874 Gorst overhauled the Conservative Party's organisation, particularly in the boroughs, but the unexpected Conservative victory in the 1874 General Election was followed by a period of apathy towards organisational matters on the part of Disraeli and his colleagues. Gorst joined forces with the borough leaders to challenge the aristocratic connections which continued to dominate the Conservative Party. The newly important borough leaders felt aggrieved because they were rarely consulted by the still all-powerful aristocratic element within the party. This feeling of political isolation prompted the urban areas to challenge the dominance of the "county" set and, indirectly, contributed towards the creation of the party's area organisation, the Provincial Unions, in 1886. In the event, the plan of re-organisation adopted in 1886 closely resembled the proposals put forward by the provincial leaders during the previous ten years.(1) The urban leaders, aided by Gorst, used the

1. J. Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the late nineteenth century", Victorian Studies, VII, 1963, p.46.

annual meetings of the National Union as a platform from which to attack the party management.⁽¹⁾ Their major grievance was neglect by the Conservative leaders. The varied demands of the party leaders in the provinces have been summarised as follows: "That every constituency ought to have an association to provide a regular and permanent organisation for the purpose of registering voters, making propaganda, choosing candidates, and conducting elections; that these local associations should be linked in provincial unions in order to make the best use of regional resources; that the provincial unions should be represented on the council of the National Union, then a largely co-operative body, so that, in the words of a speaker at the Annual Conference in 1878, 'when each gentleman on the Council felt that he represented an important district of the country, they would be able to inaugurate measures which would be of the greatest benefit to the organisation of the party; in which, at the present time, the Council did not feel they could wisely take initiative in starting.'⁽²⁾

The demands of the urban Conservative leaders had been put forward at every conference of the National Union since 1876. In 1886 their demands were finally met by the Party leadership who agreed "to establish a connection, by a regular succession of representative grades, between the smallest associations and the individual elector; through the district

1. See the M.S. Minutes of the Annual Conference of the National Union. 1876 to 1879.

2. J. Cornford, op.cit., pp.47,48.

Associations and the Central Associations of each constituency, up to the Councils of the Provincial Unions; and from these again to the council and conference of the National Union".(1) Ten years of pressure had at last been rewarded by concessions which were realistic, given the expansion of the electorate in 1884.

In 1886 Provincial Unions were established. The Conservative Party's area organisation dates from this point: "At a special conference held in May, 1886, at the Westminster Palace Hotel (now Abbey House) it was decided to promote the more efficient organisation of the National Union by forming ten Provincial Divisions, eight in England and two in Wales"(2) These new divisions came into being very quickly indeed. In the Midlands, for example, "a conference of representative Conservatives was held on the 22nd day of November 1886 at 'the Grand Hotel', Birmingham, for the purpose of forming a Provincial branch of the National Union."(3) The Midlands appears to have been typical of England as a whole.

Pressure from the Party's urban leaders was a major factor accounting for the establishment of area organisation, but there were other pressures on the Conservative leadership in the early 1880's. One was the turmoil within the party caused largely by Randolph Churchill's political ambitions. Churchill harnessed the discontent which existed within the party towards the aristocratic clique which dominated Disraeli's

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1. Minutes of the National Union Conference for 1878.
 2. The Party Organisation. Conservative and Unionist Central Office, Organisation Series, No.1, August 1964, p.3.
 3. 1886 Minute Book, Midland Union of Conservative Associations, no page numbers.

last ministry (1874-1880), and began to mobilize the National Union against Lord Salisbury and the Conservative leadership. It is not necessary to recount the details of that struggle(1) but it does appear to have had some effect in provoking reorganisation of the party's democratic structure. The Conservative Party's area organisation, the Provincial Councils, were established partly as a "safeguard against popular caprice and personal ambition. They were expected to act like water-tight compartments, as it was believed that all ten divisions would not go mad at once, and that any man would find it very hard to capture enough of them one at a time, to control the Union."(2) Provincial Councils were, therefore, created by the leadership to try and ensure that there would be no repetition of Randolph Churchill's use of the National Union to bid for power in the Conservative Party.

The 1886 Party reorganisation was also partly a recognition of the new political situation following the passing of the 1884 Reform Act which almost doubled the electorate from 3 to 5½ million adult males.(3) The redistribution of constituencies which took place in 1885 abolished all boroughs with less than 15,000 inhabitants and restricted all those with less than 50,000 to one Member of Parliament. The counties and most of the larger towns were subdivided into single-member constituencies. The large towns were given greater representation

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1. A useful summary of the dispute is contained in R.T. McKenzie, British Political Parties. (Second Edition), London, 1963, pp.166-73.
 2. A.L. Lowell, The Government of England. London, 1908, p.559
 3. The 1884 Reform Act increased the electorate from 3 million to 5½ million, or approximately 59% of the adult male population. See N. Blewett, "The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885-1918", in Past and Present, December, 1965, Volume 31.

in 1885. This necessitated greater commitment by the Conservative leadership to party organisation, particularly in the urban areas. One response was the establishment of the Party's Provincial structure.

Administratively, Provincial Unions proved to be very useful. They provided a convenient means for communicating party policy and also for supervising the party more effectively from headquarters. The leadership immediately showed a very clear desire to influence, if not control, these new organisational units. The Conservative Party's Principal Agent and one of the Party Whips were given ex-officio seats on the Council and Executive Committee of each Provincial Union. In the Midlands area, for example, the first annual report observed that E. Ashmead-Bartlett, M.P., Chairman of the National Union, R.R. Akers - Douglas, M.P. Parliamentary Whip, and Captain R.W.E. Middleton, Principal Agent of the Party, were all made ex-officio members of the Provincial Union's Executive Committee.⁽¹⁾ Far more importantly, the leadership appointed a paid agent in each area, chosen nationally and financed by central party funds. This agent also acted as secretary of his Provincial Union, thereby helping to ensure some supervision of each Union.

The 1886 re-organisation had far reaching implications. These have been summarised by Ostrogorski as follows:

1. 1886 Annual Report, Midland Provincial Union, p.2.

"Without possessing any formal power in them, the provincial agent of the Central Office nevertheless controls all the local associations of the Union, thanks to the fact that he represents the Central Office not only with the prestige as the organ of the great leaders, but also with its resources of which the associations so often stand in need - speakers for the meetings, political literature and last, but not least, money: an association which does not try to conciliate the agent of the Central Office would not obtain any assistance. To this material power it adds the seduction of civility to the secretaries of the local associations. Thus, without even resorting to much wire-pulling, the Central Office controls the organisation of the party, a complete unity of management which makes all the threads converge in the London office and utilizes the popular associations for its own ends, so as to get hold of the voters all the more easily."(1)

Given his scepticism of party organisation, perhaps Ostrogorski was not a good witness, but the theme of increased central supervision of local organisation does seem justified.

Central Office versus the National Union, 1900-1911

Between 1886 and 1906 the Conservatives were in power continuously, except for a period of three years. Party organisation was not, therefore, a major priority. During these years there were, however, periodic protests from the grass roots concerning the degree of central control over provincial organisation. At the 1887 Annual Conference, for example, one delegate proposed that the new Unions should be given the task of organising meetings and lectures in their respective districts. Central Office opposed this vigorously, arguing that such an extension of Provincial Union power would weaken the hands of the Central Executive.(2) Reaction against

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1. M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties, London, 1902, pp. 526, 527.
 2. 1887 National Union Conference Report.

Central Office was, however, closely tied up with the factional struggles within the Conservative Party at the turn of the century. For example, following the 1906 General Election when Central Office was very much the preserve of the Balfourite wing of the Party, the Chamberlainite faction outnumbered the Balfourites by 102 to 36, and the scene was set for organisational reform.

In the 1906 party reorganisation the National Union's powers were increased (albeit temporarily) at the provincial level at the expense of Central Office. Chamberlain's animosity towards Central Office was particularly marked: "As far as my information goes, the Central Office is as bad as ever, and in all negotiations between it and the country organisation it leans heavily against Tariff Reformers and in favour of the Free Food section."⁽¹⁾ Central Office was the major centre of organisational resistance to Chamberlain and the Tariff Reformers, and with the Balfourites remaining firmly in control at Central Office, Chamberlain and his followers were obliged to turn elsewhere in their attempts to topple the old guard. They attempted to undercut the powers of Central Office by widening the authority of the National Union. Chamberlain was on firm ground in moving in this direction. There had been considerable unrest with Central Office in the party at large for some years previously and the 1906 defeat strengthened the hand of those members who had been calling for the democratisation of the Conservative Party. A particularly

1. Quoted in. P. Fraser, "Unionism and Tariff Reform: The Crisis of 1906". The Historical Journal, Vol.V, No.2 (1962), p.164.

prominent critic was L.J. Maxse, a vice-president of the National Union and editor of the National Review. He moved a resolution at a special conference on organisation held in July 1906, to the effect that "no reorganisation of the National Union meets the unanimous demand of the Newcastle Conference for the reform of the central management of the Conservative Party, which can only be satisfied by bringing the Central Office under more effective popular control." (1) This motion was eventually withdrawn but it reflected something of the hostility towards Central Office evident at this time. It was in this relatively hostile environment that important organisational changes were made.

Partly to meet the impatience with Central Office control, the responsibility of the National Union "for the superintendence of organisation, the provision of literature and party speakers (other than M.P.'s)" (2) was emphasised. At the area level the area agents, employed by Central Office, were relieved of their secretarial duties towards the Provincial Councils. In future, the secretary was to be chosen and financed locally rather than by Central Office. "Yet these changes were ill-conceived, partly because factional were given more weight than organisational considerations. They emphasised the debilitating dualism of the party organisation, and impaired its electoral efficiency." (3) Following these

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1. R.B. Jones, "Balfour's Reform of Party Organisation," Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, Vol. 38, May 1965, p.94.
 2. R.T. McKenzie, op.cit., p.184.
 3. N. Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910, London, 1972, p.269.

reforms, Central Office agreed to pay the National Union a fixed annual grant of some £8,500 to cover office establishment, publications and lectures, to be supplemented at by-elections by additional grants at the discretion of the Principal Agent and the Chief Whip.⁽¹⁾ The new division of responsibilities provided the ideal excuse for inaction on the part of Central Office, particularly at the local level; it also gave rise to gross inefficiencies. Further reform was imminent.

The 1906 reforms nevertheless had important repercussions at the area level. For example:

"The effect of this (1906) reorganisation upon the Midland Union has been to considerably augment the numbers of its council and its Executive Committee whilst the eight counties comprised in the Midland area have now a largely increased representation on the Central Council of the National Union.

"These changes cannot but prove of benefit to the party generally, and your Committee welcomes them as bringing both the National and the Midland Unions into closer touch with the constituencies.

"Your Honorary Secretary, Mr. J.C. Shaw, has severed his connection with the Conservative Central Office after a period of 40 years, but has consented to retain his position in an honorary capacity, as Secretary of the Midland Union."⁽²⁾

However, the 1906 reorganisation did not have an identical effect everywhere. The North West Provincial Union split into two sections in 1906, one for Lancashire and one for Cheshire, the Cheshire Division being formed on 10th November 1906.⁽³⁾ Once formed it had to face up to the problem of employing an

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1. National Union, Executive Committee minutes, 3rd June, 1907.
 2. 1907 Annual Report, Midland Union, p.17.
 3. 1906 Minutes, Cheshire Division of the National Union, p.21.

organiser. In February 1908 it was resolved that the Cheshire County Unionist Club "will nominate, and pay the salary of an expert organiser and Secretary, to be appointed by the Cheshire National Union. He will act as Secretary to the Union, and, upon invitation, assist each constituency to reach the highest standard of efficiency."(1)

The gross organisational inefficiencies evident in the General Elections of January and December 1910, stimulated a further review of party organisation. In 1911 Balfour appointed a special committee to examine organisation and the resultant reforms were far more drastic than those of 1906. Whereas the 1906 reforms "had seen the transference of authority from an overburdened Central Office to a reorganised National Union, with an advisory committee that through lack of use and the undefined nature of its province had little influence, the changes of 1911 saw a restoration to a reformed Central Office of the authority it had formerly surrendered."(2) In 1911, following the withdrawal of Joseph Chamberlain from the political scene and the poor performance of the Conservative Party in the 1910 General Elections, it was resolved that "all executive power as regards organisation, literature and the provision of speakers should be vested entirely in Central Office."(3) The National Union, which in 1906 had been the hope of the "democratic" tendency, was firmly put in its place once again.

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1. 1908 Minutes, Cheshire Division of the National Union (no page numbers).
 2. R.B. Jones, op.cit., pp.100,101.
 3. The Times, 26th October, 1911.

The 1911 reforms included proposals to standardise the National Union Provincial areas and the Central Office organising areas. In December 1911, for example, the Cheshire Division Executive Committee meeting was attended by "Lord Kenyon (Chairman of the National Union) and Mr. Steel-Maitland, M.P., who spoke at length as to the recommendations of the Special Committee on reorganisation relating to the creation of areas in England and Wales, each with a Parliamentary Whip and Central Office Agent, and the future boundaries of Provincial Divisions. It was announced that a conference would shortly be held in Manchester to consider the points raised, and four members of the Council were elected to represent this Division."⁽¹⁾ However, there were no immediate changes in party organisation in the North West.

In the Midlands the Secretary of the Midlands Union, Mr. J.C. Shaw, retired in 1911, and the Central Office agent for the area, Major B.B. Thornton, M.C., was appointed honorary secretary of the Provincial Union, a post which he held until 1936. Central Office, therefore, soon re-established its position in the Midlands. Even in the North West where the Central Office agent was not, at this time, honorary secretary of either the Lancashire or the Cheshire Division, his influence was felt. The Central Office area agent in Lancashire and Cheshire, Mr. G.H. Croston, attended the meetings of the Cheshire Division with "unfailing regularity." The eulogy for G.H. Croston provides an indication of the relationship between

1. 1912 Minutes from the draft of the fifth annual report, Cheshire Division.

area agents and Provincial Divisions during this period: "The Unionist party in Cheshire have, during the past year, sustained a great loss by the death of the late Mr. D.F. Croston, who with unfailing regularity, attended our meetings as Agent of the Central Office. Mr. Croston had a happy, pleasant and courteous manner; and his advice, always sound, was eagerly sought for in every constituency in the county." (1) Whether or not the area agent acted as Secretary to his Provincial Union, constituency associations were frequently dependent on him for advice and information. The formal changes in 1906 and 1911 did not greatly affect this relationship.

The inter-war years: the area pattern determined

The war years and the coalition government saw party organisation again slip well down the Conservative Party's list of priorities. No major demands for reform occurred until after 1923 when electoral defeat, coupled with political difficulties, once again stimulated pressure for organisational change. For example, the Central Council of the National Union passed the following resolution on 12th February 1924: "That in the opinion of this meeting, it is desirable that more democratic methods should prevail in the councils of the party, and that a reorganisation should take place both in the constituencies and in the Central Office where it is found desirable." (2)

The Cheshire division illustrates the impact of these recommendations at the area level. At the 1924 Annual Meeting

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1. 1913, Cheshire Division of the National Union, Sixth Annual Report. (no page numbers)
 2. 1924, Conservative Annual Conference Report, folio 13.

of the Cheshire Union "a letter was read from the Principal Agent, Mr. H.E. Blain, dated 26th June, 1924, with regard to proposed alterations in the Rules of the National Unionist Association dealing with the representation of Constituency Associations on the Councils of Provincial Divisions and with the Constitution of the Central Council."(1) In effect, Central Office was requesting the amalgamation of small provincial areas. Early in 1925 the Executive Committee of the Cheshire Provincial Union issued a report on this question:

"Your committee have now considered the whole question of amalgamation in the light of this basis of representation. Having taken into consideration the strongly expressed views of the Central Office that there are too many Provincial Divisions for effective work, and that the Central Office have already amalgamated the two Provincial Divisions of Lancashire and Cheshire for the purpose of representation on the Executive Committee in London.... your executive recommend to the Council that the amalgamation should be proceeded with and that the Executive Committee should be authorised to carry out the necessary details in conjunction with the Lancashire representatives."(2)

Later in 1925 the new Lancashire and Cheshire Provincial Union was formed, although it was not until the reorganisation of 1931 that the Central Office agent for the North West eventually became secretary of the Provincial Council.(3)

Following the Conservative Party's defeat in the 1929 General Election the Central Council set up a sub-committee "to consider the replies to a questionnaire issued to the

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1. 1924, Cheshire Provincial Union, Report of Annual Meeting.
 2. 1925, Cheshire Divisional Union, Executive Committee Minutes, (January 17th).
 3. 1931, Lancashire and Cheshire Provincial Council, Executive Committee Minutes.

chairmen of constituencies in England and Wales inquiring into the reasons for the defeat of the Party at the General Election." Another sub-committee was appointed "to examine the rules and organisation of the National Union, to inquire into the relationship between the National Union, the Central Office and the Leader of the Party, and to report with recommendations for alteration or improvement."(1)

The report, presented to the Central Council on 4th March 1930, contained a number of important proposals which directly affected the party's provincial organisation. The Committee argued that "while preserving full individuality to the constituency as a unit, it is to the greater activity of the Provincial Divisions that we must look in future for a revival of local interest and a more extended means of spreading our political principles." The addendum to the report continued:

"For purposes of general organisation, the Central Office has divided England and Wales into twelve Provincial Areas, each of which is overlooked by two officials known as the Central Office Area Agents. Eight Provincial Divisions already coincide with these Central Office Areas, and we are strongly of the opinion that the sooner means can be found to federate the smaller existing Provincial Divisions into the four remaining Central Office Areas, the better it will be for our general organisation, and the more easily will the rank and file in those Areas find a means of expressing their views. We are fully aware of the difficulties in the way of federation and the fear that local feeling may be swallowed up in the larger unit. This feeling can, we consider, be maintained intact by preserving, where desired, the existing County or Grouped County organisations as units for the work they now perform, and using the larger area simply for political work which is common to the whole area. This practice is already in force in some of the larger existing provincial divisions and generally appears to be working successfully.

1. 1929 Conservative Annual Conference Report.

There, too, local feeling has to some extent been met by holding the Provincial Division meetings in turn in the larger centres of the whole Area. We consider that the Provincial Division machinery might in the future, be much more fully employed. This would, we believe, directly assist the Central Organisation of the Party by relieving it of much detail which could be better settled on the spot."(1)

This last sentence is particularly important. In both the establishment and subsequent evolution of area organisation the administrative not the democratic element has been uppermost.

The 1930 proposals for reform of the Conservative Party's area organisation were not readily accepted. A special one-day conference of the National Union was held in London on 1st July 1930 to discuss the recommendations of the sub-committee which had been set up in 1929 to look into the organisation of the Conservative Party. At this meeting there was considerable opposition to the proposed changes in the Party's provincial structure. Previously, much Provincial Council activity had been organised on a county basis; the 1930 changes were designed to amalgamate these small units in order to produce more viable organisational units at the area level. There were two major themes at the one-day conference. The most obvious was parochialism, but there was also a fear that larger units at the Provincial level would weaken the representation of party members. This view was expounded by a Mr. McKesgh from Bath:

1. Report of the Committee on Party Organisation, 1930.

"That will happen is that all but local members where the area and county conferences are held and all but the leisured and monied classes will be excluded from the Conferences. It is difficult enough to get Conservative working men and Conservative working women to the meetings, but the increased size and the increased travelling and the increased time to be occupied, it is quite certain that we shall not be able to get to area meetings in addition to the county meetings..... control will be vested even more in the hands of the well-to-do, so let us cut out Provincial Areas and let us concentrate on the County Provincial Divisions....."(1)

Opposition to the proposed restructuring was so strong that the Party leadership was forced to back down. R.T. McKenzie has observed that the pattern of provincial areas "has not been basically altered since it was established in 1930."(2) In fact, the modern structure was not established in 1930. The components of three of the proposed provincial areas failed to amalgamate in 1930. These were:

1. Middlesex and Essex
2. Kent, Surrey and Sussex
3. Devonshire, Somerset and Cornwall.

The Conservative Party's Annual Reports indicate that it was not until 1938 that Middlesex and Essex finally formed the Home Counties North Division. Kent, Surrey and Sussex finally came together in the Home Counties South-East Division in 1936, while in 1937 Devonshire, Somerset and Cornwall formed the Western Division.

Opposition to the 1930 reforms was widespread and caused delay in their implementation. The Midlands Union, for example, retained all its existing counties except Nottinghamshire,

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1. Special Conference Report, 1st July, 1930.
 2. R.T. McKenzie, op.cit., p.232.

which it lost to a newly established East Midlands Provincial Area. The exclusion of Nottinghamshire caused a storm of protest. A Midlands Union Executive Committee meeting, held on April 3rd 1930, and attended by Robert Topping, Principal Agent of the Conservative Party, reflected the prevailing mood of discontent. The minutes of this meeting indicate opposition to the exclusion of Nottinghamshire. Mrs. C. Margaret Harper from Central Nottingham, along with Alderman E.O. Trivett and Mrs. E. Littlewood, both from Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire, spoke against the transfer.(1) By 1931, however, Central Office had obtained its desired reorganization in the Midlands, despite local opposition.(2)

For the North West the year 1931 was significant in a rather different way. The Central Office area agent for the North West was appointed secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire Provincial Council. From 1906 to 1931 A.C. Whittingham had acted as secretary of the Lancashire Provincial Council (from 1925 onwards he acted as secretary of the newly formed Lancashire and Cheshire Division). The eventual resignation of Whittingham in 1931 heralded the appointment of a sub-committee "to consider the administration and expenditure of the Division; to ascertain what is done by Divisions in other parts of England; and to make representations

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1. 1930 Midlands Union, Executive Committee Minutes, April 3rd.
 2. The minutes of the General Purposes sub-committee of the Midlands Union, February 20th. 1931, observed: "This county (Nottinghamshire) has seceded from the Midland Union apparently against the wishes of many of its representatives."

to the Executive Council for the carrying on of the work of the Division."(1) This sub-committee proposed that "the office of paid secretary should be discontinued and that we should have one Hon. Secretary, who should be the Central Office Agent for the Area. (This arrangement is the method now adopted by practically all the other areas.) The area would continue to pay office rent as at present and in addition such sums as may be necessary for clerical assistance."(2) These proposals were formally adopted in April 1931. During the 1930's, therefore, the position of Central Office in the provinces, somewhat uncertain since 1906, was regularised. Its position at the area level had never been drastically weakened, even by the 1906 reorganisation. A uniform pattern of administrative units was adopted throughout England and Wales. With the exception of a major reorganisation in London this pattern has remained largely unaltered.

The standardisation of Central Office influence at the Provincial level was an important feature of the 1930's, affecting every organisational unit. For example, the 1930's saw the imposition in every area of a permanent, full-time Central Office official capable of taking responsibility for the conduct and organisation of Provincial Labour Committee affairs.(3) The full effect of this can be illustrated with reference to the Yorkshire Area. In the 1920's the Yorkshire

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1. 1931 Lancashire and Cheshire Divisional Union, Report of the Reorganisation sub-committee.
 2. 1931, Lancashire and Cheshire Division, Report of the Reorganisation sub-committee.
 3. The archive material upon which this section is based was kindly loaned to the author by John R. Greenwood, a colleague at Leicester Polytechnic who is researching into the Conservative Party's trade union structure. The Yorkshire area is far richer in archive material on the Conservative Party's Labour Movement than any of the three areas being studied in this thesis.

Federation of Labour Committees, as it had been called, had met irregularly and had failed to secure close liaison with the Yorkshire Provincial structure. It had generally received little encouragement or support from the Provincial leadership. Following the changes proposed nationally in 1930, the area Central Office agent, Stephen Piersenné, personally met the Federation and secured their agreement "to alter their constitution in order to bring it into line with the National Union rules and proposed rules of the Yorkshire Provincial Division."⁽¹⁾

Piersenné appears thereafter to have taken a prominent part in securing the necessary changes, and at the inaugural meeting of the new Yorkshire Labour Advisory Committee he, himself, took the chair. Not only this, Piersenné, in his capacity as secretary of the Yorkshire Provincial Area Council, secured for himself appointment as a Joint Secretary of the Area Labour Committee, a post which he, and subsequently his successor as area agent, held throughout the 1930's. The importance of this appointment was twofold. Firstly, it ensured that agendas and minutes were properly circulated and that a full record was kept of the Area Labour Committee's activities. Secondly, the active participation of the area agent in Labour Committee affairs provided the committee with a direct link with other parts of the Provincial Party Organisation; never during the 1930's does the Labour Committee appear to have become as isolated within the provincial structure as had the Labour Federation in the 1920's.

1. Yorkshire Provincial Area Council, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, 12th February, 1931.

It is clear from the evidence that in the Yorkshire Area, at least, the strengthening of the Labour Movement at the Provincial level was largely due to the efforts of the area agents in the 1930's. It was Piersenné who, for example, in Yorkshire met the leaders of the old Federation to discuss constitutional changes. It was he who made the arrangements for the inaugural meeting of the reconstituted Area Labour Committee which he himself chaired. It was he who proposed the reimbursement of Labour delegates' travelling expenses to the Area Finance and General Purposes Committee, and he also who, as we have seen, took over the joint secretaryship of the Labour Committee. The area agent, in other words, spearheaded the campaign to establish and maintain the Provincial Labour Committees during the 1930's and, given the standardisation of Central Office influence at the provincial level, there is no reason to believe that area agents in other areas were any less well placed to take similar initiatives.

Reform and Change: The Post War Years

The massive Conservative defeat in the 1945 General Election produced demands for organisational reform. Very quickly changes were made at the area level. By 1947 all twelve areas had established a Trade Union Advisory Committee, serviced by nationally employed trade union organisers. Young Conservative Organisers and Conservative Political Centre (C.P.C.) Organisers were also appointed to each area. Again, these officials were appointed and financed by Central Office. There were further organisational developments in the immediate

post war era. In March 1948 the Maxwell-Pyfe Committee was set up by the Executive Committee of the National Union to examine all aspects of party organisation. This committee produced what R.T. McKenzie has described as "the most extensive review of the party organisation which has been undertaken in this century." (1) Amongst many other important recommendations, the committee proposed the retention of the area structure, although it recognised "that for certain purposes the area chairman, dealing sometimes with as many as eighty constituencies, is compelled to break down the area into smaller groups". (2) The committee rejected the suggestion that area agents should be appointed by the area from a panel approved by the Executive Committee of the National Union. The same issue arose in the Labour Party with a similar outcome. Both party leaderships have retained their powers to appoint regional and area staff, despite pressure from the grass roots.

The Maxwell-Pyfe Report consolidated the position of the area structure within the party:

"We believe that the establishment of a direct chain of communication from the chairman of the Party Organisation through Area and Constituency Chairmen down to Branch Chairmen is the most effective method by which confidential information relating to organisation may be passed. We are of the opinion that the exchange of information will greatly stimulate branches, constituencies and areas to rise to the level of the best performance." (3)

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1. R.T. McKenzie, op.cit., p.183.
 2. Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (The Maxwell-Pyfe Report), London, 1949, p.3.
 3. *ibid*, p.24.

Between 1948 and 1971 two further reports on party organisation examined the area structure. In 1963 Selwyn Lloyd was asked by the Party Chairman to examine "the need for closer liaison between Members of the Party in Parliament, the National Union and the Central Office." (1) While accepting that the Party's area organisation had on the whole worked well, Lloyd proposed an increase in the number of areas, a recommendation which has subsequently come to nothing. The only major change in the 1960's came with the establishment of the new Greater London Council; this reduced rather than increased the number of areas. In 1963 the old Home Counties Area amalgamated with the old London Area, producing a new Greater London Area with 103 constituencies.

The Macleod Committee was set up in December 1964 by the Party Chairman, Lord Blakenham, to look into the Young Conservative Organisation. Chapter six of this report examined the area structure and its importance to the Young Conservative Organisation:

"The importance of the Area Organisation has been underrated in the past. We believe that it has a key role in ensuring that decisions and initiatives taken at national level are brought to the attention of and acted on by the constituencies. At the same time it is responsible for communicating the ideas of constituencies to the National Advisory Committee. In addition to this the Area Organisation has the job of co-ordinating the activities of constituencies within its boundaries." (2)

Macleod proposed the creation of an Area Activity Committee and the inauguration of area plans which were concerned with

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1. The Selwyn Lloyd Report. Conservative Central Office, London, 1963, p.3.
 2. The Macleod Report. Conservative Central Office, London, 1965, p.16.

the formation of new organisations where none existed and with "helping constituencies to help weaker neighbours." (1) In practice, however, the Macleod Report has not made a great impact.

During the 1960's the Conservative Party reduced its personnel at the area level. In 1968 each area lost its specialist staff, and the work previously carried out by the area publicity officers, trade union organisers, and C.P.C. (Conservative Political Centre) organisers became the province of one person, a new Deputy Area Agent. Anthony Barber, the Party Chairman, explained the changes at the 1968 Annual Conference:

"The system of Area Press Officers, Area C.P.C. Officers, and Area Industrial Officers, was simply not working properly. So, after consulting the officers of the respective Advisory Committees, I came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to scrap the old system completely and, instead, to appoint nine additional Deputy Area Agents so that the C.P.C. and the very important matter of industrial organisation would be the special responsibility of someone at the very top in each area. Relations with press, radio and television.... are of such importance that I decided that they should be the responsibility of the area agent himself." (2)

These proposals meant a net reduction of two organisers per area. The 1968 Annual Report of the North West Area observed: "We were all shocked to hear that as a result of the Party's serious financial position a top-level decision had to be made to dispense with the services of all Area C.P.C. Officers, Trade Union Organisers and Area Press Officers...." (3) The

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1. *ibid*, p.17.
 2. 1968 Conservative Party Annual Report, p.24.
 3. 1968 Annual Report, North West Provincial Area. p.12.

official reaction was one of shock rather than grief, no doubt because the area structure, as it existed before 1963, was not very satisfactory; it produced empire building, with each specialised area officer out to develop his own particular sphere of activity, irrespective of the other area units. In addition the old system produced a situation in which there were direct links between area and central office specialists. For example, the Press Officer at Area Office was responsible to the Press Officer at Central Office. According to the Party's Director of Organisation "This system caused problems for the area agent and one sometimes did not know what was going on within one's own office. There tended to be a lack of co-ordination in area office." (1)

It appears that Webster has understated the difficulties presented by the presence of specialists at the area office. The complexity of the relationship between the area specialists, the area agent and Central Office can be illustrated with reference to a document issued by Eric Adamson, Head of the Labour Department at Central Office from 1939-1953. Adamson wrote:

"Organisers are employed and paid for by Central Office. They are attached to the Provincial Areas and work under the guidance and discipline of the Central Office Agent. It is the Area Agent who should say in which Constituency or District the Organiser will work and make the preliminary arrangements. There is sometimes a tendency to treat the Trade Union Organiser as a servant of the Area and to lessen the tie with the Labour Department. (On occasions there is) a demand that all reports, journals etc. must be sent to the Area Agent who will forward them to the centre. The policy laid down in regard to this, is that the weekly, monthly and six monthly reports shall be sent to Central Office with a copy to the Area. In one

1. Interview with Sir Richard Webster, Director of Organisation, 1970.

certain case the Area Agent has sought to prevent the Conservative Councils in his area from having direct communication with the Labour Department informing him that all letters should be to the Area Office."(1)

For a variety of reasons, therefore, the area structure was rationalised in the late 1960's. By January 1970 there was a total of 36 Central Office agents and deputies operating in the eleven English and Welsh areas. In addition, each area had a Young Conservative Organiser working under the direction of the area agent. The new Greater London Area with 103 constituencies was serviced by two area agents, two deputies, and an administrative officer who was also a Central Office agent. Apart from the changes in London, however, the area structure remains much as it was at the end of the 1930's. The eleven Central Office areas coincide with the areas of the National Union.

Summary

The Conservative Party's area organisation has evolved gradually since 1886. Like the rest of the Party's organisation outside Parliament, it has the aim of serving the leadership. By the end of the 1930's Central Office had succeeded in standardising the party's area organisation. It had also secured the post of honorary secretary in each Provincial Union for its area agents. The area offices provide the party leadership with a network of field units to deal with routine administration. They were established to act as the "branch

1. E.S. Adamson, Extract from a Central Office document, prepared by Adamson outlining the position of Labour Organisers within the Party, pp.14.15, author's brackets. (no date given)

offices" of Central Office and to provide a link between constituencies and the party leadership. Administrative, rather than democratic, reasons have prompted the further development of area organisation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ADVENT OF LABOUR PARTY REGIONAL ORGANISATION

Twentieth Century Origins

The historical development of the Labour Party's regional organisation was somewhat different. It was not until 1900 that the Labour Representation Committee was established; in 1906 it changed its name to the Labour Party. At the turn of the century the Labour Party was barely embryonic, whereas the Conservative Party had long been a political force in the land. In these early years the Labour Party's organisation was inevitably rather primitive. The establishment of local Labour Parties was largely the work of pioneers in the Independent Labour Party but was relatively slow in gaining momentum. By 1906 some 76 local Labour Parties had been established and these formed the framework of what was to develop into a national political party.⁽¹⁾ In the 1906 General Election the L.R.C. fought fifty constituencies, polled over 300,000 votes and returned 29 Members of Parliament, thanks to an agreement with the Liberal Party. At the first meeting of the L.R.C's Members of Parliament, in February 1906, a new Parliamentary Party, the Labour Party, came into existence.

While party organisation continued to develop at the constituency level, the establishment of regional machinery was not a priority in these early years. When eventually the National Executive Committee began to think about developing

1. F. Bealey and H. Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906, London, 1958, p.239.

some form of regional organisation it met opposition stronger than that faced earlier by the Conservative Party leadership. Opposition was still very much in evidence in the 1960's, when there was a fierce outcry against the National Executive Committee's attempts to control the appointment of a General Secretary to the newly established Greater London Regional Council of the Labour Party. Despite occasional difficulties, however, the N.E.C., like the Conservative Party leadership, has succeeded in establishing a network of regional field agents.

Soon after the formation of the Labour Party, the leadership attempted to provide organisational initiatives. At the 1908 Annual Party Conference Arthur Henderson proposed that "This conference instructs the Executive to appoint a Parliamentary Election Agent at a salary of £200 per annum with expenses."⁽¹⁾ This resolution disturbed many delegates, notably those who were suspicious of increased central control in the Labour Party. Their spokesman was Mr. Ben Turner (Weavers Union) who said that "he wished to oppose the resolution with the same earnestness that Mr. Henderson had supported it. He did so because he did not think that the party needed a special election agent centralised in London to overlook all the country at large. He believed that in the old Conservative and Liberal Parties there was a good deal too much officialdom, too much of the caucus work, too much management from London." Turner "wanted more freedom in our

1. 1908 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.54. The Labour Party's Annual Reports provide the most useful source of information on the origins of the Party's regional organisation. This chapter draws very largely on this source, and, where appropriate, on Annual Reports from the newly created regional councils.

movement..... If it was a question of written advice from the Head Office, that could be done and had been done very well indeed by Mr. MacDonald and his staff with Mr. Henderson as well..... He wanted freedom in the whole country at large and he was, therefore, dead against an Election agent at the present time."(1) The close voting on the resolution indicates the degree of opposition to what some delegates regarded as increased centralisation.(2)

For the resolution 567,000

Against the resolution 429,000

The Labour Party's Quarterly Circular of April 1908 reported the response to a press advertisement for the post of Parliamentary Election Agent: "About ninety replies were received, and a sub-committee presented six applicants to the full Executive, which, at its meeting on March 18th, agreed to the appointment of Mr. Arthur Peters".(3) Peters had been for "over three years Mr. Duncan's agent at Barrow-in-Furness,"(4) and the N.E.C. hoped that his employment at Head Office would "vastly improve the organising side of our work, which has been steadily growing in importance, but which our limited staff has not been able to treat adequately up to now."(5)

The appointment of Peters saw the beginnings of national party intervention at the constituency level. The Annual Reports for the years up to 1914 indicate an increasing number

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1. 1908 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.55.
 2. *ibid*, p.55.
 3. Labour Party Quarterly Circular, No.19, April 1908, p.1.
 4. 1909 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.13.
 5. Labour Party Quarterly Circular, *op.cit.*, p.1.

of requests from constituencies for information and advice, but many localities remained hostile towards the national party machine. At the 1913 Annual Conference Mr. J.A. Seddon (Newton Division Labour Party) moved the following resolution on behalf of his constituency party:

"That the Executive of the Labour Party be empowered to draw up and bring into operation a scheme for the engagement of organisers, who shall devote their time, under the direction of the National Party to helping to build up or strengthen the local Labour Organisations in as many suitable constituencies as possible, so that whenever it is deemed desirable to contest any constituency with a Labour candidate, the local organisation, including a strong branch of the Women's Labour League, which is necessary to ensure a fair measure of success, will be in existence."(1) Mr. J. Cross, another delegate, protested, asserting that "better results would be obtained by the local people doing the organising work for themselves than by importing an organiser from outside".(2) Yet another delegate was "opposed to the idea of constituencies being continually spoon-fed from the Central Office.... The local organisations need to be taught to rely more upon their own efforts and less on the efforts of the Central Executive".(3)

Despite the opposition, Mr. G. Higenbottom from Liverpool and Mr. W. Holmes from Norwich were appointed national organisers in 1914.(4) These organisers were employed by, and

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1. 1913 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.90.
 2. *ibid.*, p.90.
 3. *ibid.*, p.91.
 4. 1916 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.20.

were under the general supervision of, Head Office, but the First World War interfered with their work and, after a brief tour of constituencies, they devoted the following six months to war emergency matters in their own localities. In the spring of 1915, however, the N.E.C. "felt that both the organisers could very usefully renew their normal activities, and since that date Mr. Holmes has toured the constituencies of Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland and South Wales, while Mr. Higenbottam has visited a number of constituencies in the Lancashire and Midland areas."⁽¹⁾ Early in 1917, however, Higenbottam and Holmes were seconded to London to assist at Transport House because Head Office had been diminished by enlistment.

In 1914 the N.E.C. extended its sphere of influence when Mr. Ben Shaw of Glasgow was appointed as its Scottish Secretary. In 1915 Shaw also became Secretary of the newly established Scottish Advisory Council. This encroachment by the National Executive Committee was challenged. Most of the criticism was directed against a clause in the Constitution of the Scottish Advisory Council which dealt with the position of the Organising Secretary: "The Organising Secretary shall be paid as a permanent official appointed by and responsible to the Executive Committee of the Labour Party".⁽²⁾ One Scottish delegate at the 1914 Annual Conference maintained that "as the Organising Secretary would be working entirely in Scotland he should be under the control of the Executive".⁽³⁾

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1. 1916 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.20.
 2. 1913 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.8.
 3. 1914 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.33.

Nothing, however, came of the Scottish protest.

The Representation of the People Act, 1918, encouraged the further development of Labour Party organisation. The Act enfranchised all male citizens over the age of 21, as well as women over 30 who owned, or whose husbands owned, lands or premises with an annual value of at least £5. Consequently the British electorate increased from 8,357,648 in 1915 to 21,392,322 in 1918.(1) The enfranchisement of women over 30 led to the appointment in 1918 of a woman officer, Dr. Marion Philips, and two national women organisers to assist organisation at the constituency level. By March 1919 two more national women organisers had been appointed, and they concentrated their work on specific regions. Their task was to form Women's Advisory Councils for each district; by 1919 two such Councils had been established, one in Lancashire and Cheshire and the other in London.(2)

The Regional Solution. 1920 - 1948

In 1914 Labour Party membership stood at 1,612,147; by 1920 this had risen to 4,359,807. It was against the background of franchise reform and expanding party membership that the N.E.C. set up a sub-committee to review the whole system of party organisation. On the recommendation of this sub-committee the N.E.C. decided that organisational improvements were necessary. It proposed the division of England, Scotland and Wales into eight organising areas. The N.E.C's

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1. 1919 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.33.
 2. *ibid.*, pp.33,34.

report to the 1920 Annual Conference stated:

"The present method of having two organisers travelling the whole country has served its purpose, and with the growth of the party, and the increased constituencies a more direct and comprehensive method is required. The effect of the new scheme will be to bring the whole country into personal touch with the national staff, to ensure personal visitation, consultation, inspection and report, and to bring every part of the country under the special charge of a district organiser, with the assistance of a woman organiser in each area."(1)

The new regional organisers were to be selected and employed nationally rather than locally; they were to be the agents of the N.E.C. at the regional level. An increase in affiliation fees was granted by the 1920 Annual Conference, which enabled the N.E.C. to establish this new scheme. In the event, however, the country was divided into nine rather than eight organising districts,(2) each with a District (or Regional) organiser and a Women's organiser:

A	North-Eastern
B	North-Western
C	Midlands
D	Southern and Home Counties
E	London
F	South-Western
G	Eastern
H	Wales and Monmouth
J	Scotland

By 1921, therefore, a network of regional organisers had been established to deal with the tremendous increase, after the First World War, in both working class voters and party members. The National Agent was responsible for arranging and directing the work of the organisers: "The work of the district organisers will be to act under the direction of the

1. 1920 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.18.

2. 1921 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, pp.33,34.

National Agent in inspecting, advising, and consulting with the agents in the constituencies, developing organisation in areas where divisional and local parties are not at present formed, and to assist in the training of agents in connection with the Head Office Scheme and generally to co-operate in the organisation work of the Party as required by the Head Office."(1) Their position vis à vis Head Office was clearly established from the outset.

The advent of the party's regional organisation did not suddenly create an efficient organisational network. Far from it. With the exception of Scotland and London, there was no office accommodation available, and organisers had to work from their own homes. In addition, the organising areas were too large to allow detailed work at the constituency level. Despite these inadequacies, the creation of nine regions, staffed by employees of the N.E.C., marked the party's first concerted attempt to establish a close rapport with the constituencies, since these national officials helped to stimulate party activity locally. In 1922 there were 2,400 Divisional and local Labour Parties and Trades Councils in Britain. By 1926 some 3,314 Divisional and local Labour Parties and Trades Councils were functioning.(2) In part, at least, the increase can be attributed to the work of these national field agents. Since all the organisers were making regular visits to constituencies, giving advice and help, "personal touch between the parties in the constituencies and the National Staff is

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1. 1920 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.18.
 2. 1922, Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.50 and 1926 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.3.

well maintained."(1) In the Midlands, for example, the two organisers "covered their wide area by visits, and a forward movement with regard to organisation has been started in several of the difficult positions of the Midland area".(2) In the South-West region, the two organisers "worked hard under difficult circumstances in this wide and rural area. Much of the work has been of a propaganda character, but substantial progress is being made in the upbuilding of permanent organisation."(3)

The early 1920's also witnessed the advent of regional conferences. The first conferences, held between July and December, 1921, were convened in order to prepare constituencies for the pending General Election. They were invariably attended by the National Agent and other national officials, as well as by the regional organisers. At the conferences "Methods of organisation, electoral law and the services to the parties by the departments of the Head Office particularly in relation to an election campaign, were more fully explained and discussed".(4) In addition, sometimes as many as 2,000 delegates from surrounding constituencies attended regional mass rallies at which the Party leaders explained contemporary policy. The cost of these regional gatherings was borne by the National Executive Committee.

Lack of financial resources, rather than absence of political foresight, appears to have been responsible for the

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1. 1922 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.50.
 2. *ibid.*, p.51.
 3. *ibid.*, p.51.
 4. 1922 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.53.

piecemeal development of the Labour Party's regional organisation. In particular, shortage of money was the root cause for the delay in establishing a regional structure for Wales. From 1917 onwards there were demands from various groups, notably the South Wales Labour Federation, for a Welsh Advisory Council on similar lines to that recently established in Scotland. The N.E.C. examined the matter in some detail before concluding: "On the basis of nationality Wales certainly appears to have a claim, and if devolution is decided upon, some organisation to give the Party in Wales a corporate means of expressing itself will be necessary. Whether the resources of the Party are equal to the strain and whether it is wise to anticipate devolution now, and whether a grant for an Advisory Council to Wales will act as an incentive to similar claims.... are matters that require serious consideration..."(1) For financial reasons, however, no Council was established. In 1925 there were further resolutions in favour of establishing an Advisory Council for Wales but, once again, the Executive's answer was that "the position of the Party's resources does not render the time opportune for such a development at present".(2) The Party's financial plight was emphasised by the fact that when, in August 1928, Mr.W. Holmes, Eastern Counties District Organiser, resigned his position, the party could not afford to obtain a replacement.

It was not until August 1937, some twenty years after the initial soundings, that the South Wales Regional Council for

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1. 1920 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.17.
 2. 1925 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.44.

Labour was finally established.(1) In 1947 this was extended to cover the whole of Wales and became the Welsh Council of Labour.(2) The establishment of a regional council in South Wales produced tensions similar to those found earlier in Scotland. As in Scotland, the chief bone of contention was the degree of national supervision over the new Council. The N.E.C. wanted to secure some influence over regional affairs: to do this, it adopted a similar strategy to the one which had proved successful in Scotland. The Constitution of the South Wales Regional Council stipulated: "The Welsh District Organiser of the Labour Party shall act as Secretary to the Regional Council".(3) The N.E.C. was anxious to bring the notoriously left-wing South Wales Min Federation, into the main stream of the party. It felt that greater co-ordination between the political and industrial wings of the movement was a necessity if the Labour Party in South Wales was to realise its full potential. As in Scotland, there was considerable opposition to the intrusion of the national party machine in South Wales. At the 1937 Annual Conference, Councillor E. Allan Robson (Cardiff T.C. and L.P.) asserted that, because of the somewhat divergent approach of the "Council of Action", an unofficial industrial movement dominated by the Miner's Federation of South Wales, on a number of issues, notably employment, "We got on the black books of the N.E.C." with the result that the regional council was

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1. "The first meeting of the Executive Committee was held on Saturday 28th August 1937." (See First South Wales Regional Council Annual Report, p.13.)
 2. 1948 Welsh Council of Labour Annual Report, p.13.
 3. South Wales Regional Council of the Labour Party, Rules and Constitution, Clause XIV.

established by the N.E.C. "in order that it could gain greater influence over the Labour movement in Wales". Robson drew attention to the fact that "there is no democratic right to elect the Secretary. The Executive has been able to bring pressure to bear so that the District Organiser shall be permanently the Secretary of the Council".(1) Replying, Mr. Arthur Jenkins, M.P., for the N.E.C., asserted: "it is sheer nonsense to say that the National Executive Council will dominate that body simply because a full-time official of the Labour Party is going to act as Secretary".(2) Jenkins was probably correct in maintaining that the N.E.C. would not "dominate" the regional council through the Secretary, but, nevertheless, the hope seemed to be that, through the establishment of the Council, the Labour movement in Wales would be more easily influenced by the National Executive Committee.

Despite the financial constraints of the 1930's, the N.E.C. began to develop a democratic regional structure to parallel its own organisational units. The industrial North-West with its high level of affiliated union membership was considered a viable starting point. On 17th September 1938 the Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council of the Labour Party was formed.(3) The desire to co-ordinate, within a given area, all affiliated party units stimulated the development of the Labour Party's

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1. 1937 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.225.
 2. *ibid.*, p.225.
 3. Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council, First Annual Report. R.T. McKenzie in British Political Parties makes a minor mistake concerning the origins of regional councils: "The first two regional councils of the Labour Party were those established in 1938, one for Lancashire and Cheshire, and the other for Wales." (p.531) In fact, the Scottish Advisory Council was established in 1914, the South Wales Regional Council in 1937, and the Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council in September, 1938.

regional organisation. The general position of the Labour Party's regional staff in the 1930's was well summarised in a note in The Labour Organiser of February 1935. An interesting attitude to observe is that, despite the hostility of many constituencies towards regional organisers as the representatives of the National Executive Committee, many constituency parties were anxious to utilise the expertise which these national employees could provide:

"The national staff of the Labour Party is somewhat to be pitied these days. One or two of the present District and Women organisers date their appointments back to 1918, but the mapping out of the country into regions took place in 1924, when the appointment of a man District Organiser and a Woman District Organiser to each of the nine districts took place. With one vacancy there are now eight Men District Organisers (including the Scottish Secretary) and nine Women Organisers. Since 1924 there has been a tremendous development of Party machinery and Party strength, but the (regional) staff remains at the same numerical strength. When the staff was first appointed it was, we believe, contemplated that offices would be opened, or at any rate that some development would take place as time went on, and the Party grew. Financial stringency has, however, entirely prevented any growth of staff or any developments of the kind indicated, but at the same time the expectations of the Movement, and the closer contact which long association entails, has considerably increased the calls upon, or the expectations of the staff, as it now stands. We are not voicing any complaint, but we write these lines because we feel that there are persons in the constituencies with a grumble, and we have heard those who have expressed a dissatisfaction because they cannot in their constituencies see the regional officers as often as they would like."⁽¹⁾

On 10th January 1942 a Northern Regional Council was formed to cover the counties of Durham, Northumberland, and the North Riding of Yorkshire. In the following month a Yorkshire Regional Council, incorporating the East and West Ridings, was established. In December 1942 the Midlands

1. The Labour Organiser. No.164, February 1935, p.21, author's brackets.

Organising region was divided into the East and West Midlands, and a Regional Council was established in both these areas.(1) Referring to the development of these four new regional councils, the N.E.C. observed in 1942/3, that it "had welcomed this activity with sympathy and approval, as the structure of the Party had been greatly strengthened by the influential delegations now functioning in the new bodies..... Although the whole country is not yet provided with this type of organisation, a pause in the creation of further councils is desirable. Action will be taken in other areas when local resources are sufficient to provide for the successful operation of the Councils therein."(2)

In 1944 the N.E.C. reported that "when finance is available for the purpose, Regional Councils will be established in the Eastern Counties", (3) but lack of funds delayed further development of regional machinery until 1947, when the Eastern and Southern Regional Councils were formed.(4) With the establishment of the South Western Regional Council in May 1948,(5) the whole of Britain was serviced by a network of regional councils, each served by a regional organiser appointed by the National Executive Committee.

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1. In the East Midlands, preliminary conferences were held on December 5th 1942 and February 13th 1943, for the purpose of establishing the Regional Council. (See East Midlands Regional Council, First Annual Report.)
 2. 1943 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.30.
 3. 1944 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.14.
 4. 1948 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, pp.11,14.
 5. The First Annual Meeting of the South Western Regional Council was held on 8th May 1948. (See First Annual Report.)

The N.E.C. strengthened its hold over the regions in the early 1950's. The 1951 Annual Conference Report stated: "The N.E.C. has had under review its financial relationship with the Regional Councils. In the light of experience, and with an increasing Regional Staff, it is necessary that added facilities in the form of accommodation and clerical assistance should be made available. During the formative years of the Regional Councils, the N.E.C. has made grants but the responsibility for providing the facilities referred to has been that of the Regional Councils. A re-adjustment has now been made whereby the Regional Offices become the Regional Offices of the Labour Party, and responsibility is also being accepted for the clerical staff."(1) The Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council resisted this intrusion by Head Office. In its view "the best interests of the Party would be served by the (regional) office remaining the office of the Regional Council and under its direction".(2) The N.E.C. threatened to withhold its annual grant unless the regional executive agreed that the office should become the property of the N.E.C. It was this threat which finally forced the regional council to give way to the N.E.C. demands: "It seems evident..... that the Organisation Department (with the co-operation of the Finance Committee) has not hesitated to use economic sanctions to ensure that it retains full control of the affairs of the regional offices".(3)

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1. 1951 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.15.
 2. 1953 Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council, Annual Report, p.3., author brackets.
 3. R.T. McKenzie, op.cit., p.14.

By 1950, therefore, there were ten Regional Councils functioning in England, Scotland and Wales. These, together with the London Labour Party, helped stimulate the development and co-ordination of party activity throughout the country. In 1951, however, a small but significant redistribution occurred: the large Southern Region, with 101 constituencies, was reduced to 73 constituencies with the surplus going to neighbouring regions. At the same time, the N.E.C. decided, after negotiations with the London Labour Party and Middlesex Constituency Labour Parties, to merge the administrative county of London and the County of Middlesex, increasing the number of constituencies in London to 71.(1) Further changes, however, were soon proposed in London.

Wilson and Simpson: Reform and Change, 1955 - 1968

The Wilson Committee was appointed by the N.E.C. in June 1955, following the Party's General Election defeat earlier in the year, to enquire into the general organisation of the Party and to report back in September.(2) During its investigation the Committee visited every regional office, meeting organisers and their deputies. In its report the Committee suggested that: "consideration might be given to the creation of a new Central Southern Area (corresponding to the Conservative's Wessex Region) including Hampshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire, or perhaps a new (North of the Thames) Home Counties Area covering Middlesex, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire." It also proposed that "The question of sub-regional offices

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1. 1951 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.14.
 2. 1955 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.63.

in Wales and Scotland might also be reconsidered".(1)

By 1957 the N.E.C. had agreed to establish a new region with a full complement of organisers, incorporating the 54 constituencies in the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, and Middlesex. But this decision split the counties concerned: "Approximately half of them approved the proposals and half opposed the proposals".(2) In view of this the N.E.C. decided not to proceed with the establishment of a new regional council, but to leave the parties, trade unions and other bodies to continue their affiliation with existing regional councils. However, it was decided to regard the area as a new organising region in the charge of a regional organiser. "It is believed that this arrangement, while not disturbing existing regional ties will enable a better organising service to be given".(3) A new organising area was, therefore, established without a regional council. The constituencies concerned remained affiliated to adjacent regional councils. This new organising region, Northern Home Counties, was formally established on 1st January 1959.

The Labour Party's second major organisational survey in the Post-War years was completed in 1968. In November 1966 a small Committee of Enquiry had been set up by the N.E.C. to "enquire into Party organisation at all levels".(4) One of

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1. *ibid.*, p.69.
 2. 1958 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.17.
 3. *ibid.*, p.17 (N.E.C. Report).
 4. Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Party Organisation, The Labour Party, 1968, p.17.

the Committee's three working parties was concerned with regional organisation. Its final report observed: "The creation of the Greater London Council made necessary the creation of corresponding Party machinery. In our interim report we proposed that this should take the form of a Greater London Regional Council. Our proposal meant not only that the London Labour Party would disappear and its place to be taken by a regional council, but also that there would have to be changes in the boundaries of the adjacent regions from which constituencies had been transferred to Greater London".(1)

The Committee proposed that the Northern Home Counties organising region be abolished and that its constituencies be returned to the regions in which they had previously belonged. It also recommended that Peterborough be transferred from the East Midlands to the Eastern Region, and that the Westmorland constituency be transferred from the North Western Region to the Northern Region.(2)

At a consultative conference held at Hemel Hempstead on 16th November 1968 strong views were expressed in support of a proposal that the Northern Home Counties should remain an organising area and, in addition, that it should have its own Regional Council. At its meeting on 27th November, the N.E.C. considered a detailed report of this consultation and determined:

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1. *ibid.*, p.17.
 2. *ibid.*, p.18.

1. That the Northern Counties Organising Area be abolished as recommended by the Enquiry Committee.
2. That the constituency parties and County Federations in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire shall be part of the Eastern Regional Council and be serviced by the Eastern Region Organising Staff.
3. That the constituency parties and County Federations in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire shall be part of the Southern Regional Council and will be serviced by the Southern Region Organising Staff. These new arrangements come into force from the 1st January 1969.(1)

The recommendations of the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Party Organisation provided the basis for reorganisation in the capital. On 31st March 1968 the Greater London Regional Council of the Labour Party was established, covering 100 constituencies and encompassing a population of eight million people. The N.E.C. divided the Greater London region into two areas, north and south, each with a team of three organisers: a senior organiser and two assistants, one of whom also dealt with Youth organisation while the other dealt with Women's Organisation. This team of six organisers was directly responsible to the General Secretary of the Greater London Regional Council. Mr. L. Sims, formerly Assistant National Agent of the Labour Party became the first General Secretary of the new Council.(2)

The development of the Greater London Regional Council involved the dismantling of the old London Labour Party.

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1. Information from a circular letter sent by the National Agent (dated 6.12.68.) to Constituency Parties and County Federations in Northern Home Counties organising area. Also, S. Barker, "Changes in some of our Regional Boundaries", Labour Organiser, 1969, pp.28,29.
 2. Mr. L. Sims retired in 1970. He was replaced by the Assistant General Secretary in London, Mr. R. Delafield.

This caused hostility, especially among the left-wing constituencies in inner London. The focus of the grievances, as in Scotland and Wales many years earlier, was the replacement of a Secretary chosen by, and responsible to, the London Labour Party, by someone selected and employed by the N.E.C. The left-wing groups, in particular, did not want an official from Transport House running their affairs. Unlike Regional Councils, the London Labour Party had always selected and employed its own secretary. Not unnaturally, many constituencies wanted to retain this privilege. The N.E.C., however, refused to allow this, although it did concede that "The General Secretary and the Assistant Secretary shall be appointed by the National Executive Committee in consultation with the Executive Committee (of the Greater London Regional Council)."(1) Over the appointment of the first two General Secretaries the Council's Chairman merely attended the selection conference in an ex-officio capacity. He had no voting powers at the conference.

Summary

As well as the more obvious reasons for the establishment of regional organisation, namely the need to develop constituency organisation and to establish "in every part of the country a complete liaison between co-operatives, Trade Unions, and the Constituency Labour Parties", (2) the development of a regional network had also served to strengthen national party influence at the local level.

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1. Greater London Regional Council of the Labour Party. Rules and Standing Orders, 1969, Clause X, author's brackets.
 2. Mr. Morgan Phillips, General Secretary, The Labour Party at 1949 Annual Conference. See Report, p.134.

In 1971 the Labour Party had eleven regional councils in the three home counties (See Page 24 for details). The Party employed 38 regional organisers and deputy regional organisers, plus the Secretary of the Greater London Regional Council and the Chief Administrative Officer for Greater London.⁽¹⁾ The development of the Labour Party's regional organisation has produced tensions not unlike some of those found in the Conservative Party many years earlier. The N.E.C., however, has remained firmly in control throughout the development and early years of the Party's regional structure; it has not been forced to grant concessions to the democratic organisation in the way that the Conservative Party leadership was pressurised into weakening its control over the area structure at the turn of the century. Each regional office is a branch of Transport House and the N.E.C. in the same way that each Conservative area office is a branch of Central Office and the Party leadership. The Labour Party's regional organisers serve as the field administrative agents of the National Executive Committee.

1. Information from Interview with H.R. Underhill, Assistant National Agent, January, 1971.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATIONAL/REGIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

As we have seen both the Conservative and Labour Parties have established networks of regional offices upon which the respective leaderships have devolved administrative work. The devolution of administrative workload, however, is not identical with the decentralisation of administrative power. In both parties all important organisational initiatives are taken nationally. Regional organisers and area agents implement these initiatives locally. In this context Professor H. Jacob has asserted that:

"Every regime faces the troublesome task of making certain that its policies are translated into action rather than remaining paper mandates. This requires stationing government officials outside the capital, that is, in the field. Such field officials must be given enough flexibility to carry out programmes as they see fit, so that they can meet the particular problems of their locale. At the same time the central government must retain sufficient control over its field agents to assure fully-fledged execution of national programmes, for they are removed from direct contact with central officials".(1)

Regional organisers and area agents are the employees of their respective party leaderships, under whose direction they work. Constitutional provisions and formal rules provide a framework within which organisers at this level must operate. Details of this formal framework are contained in Appendix A. Some discussion of the personnel working at the regional level is provided at the outset of this chapter as background material for its major focus, the relationship of regional organisers and area agents with their respective head offices.

1. H. Jacob, German Administration Since Bismarck, New Haven and London, 1963, p.1.

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The professional side of the Conservative Party's organisation, Central Office, has close links with the National Union, both centrally and in the areas. Nationally, the Director of Organisation also acts as honorary secretary of the National Union. In the same way, a Central Office area agent always acts as the honorary secretary of his Area Council and its committees. In addition, the various departments at Central Office are linked with the National Union through the Union's advisory committees. Labour Party regional organisers, like Conservative area agents, are appointed nationally, but are the employees of the party's National Executive Committee and not of the Parliamentary leadership. The formal relationship between regional organisers and their regional councils is clearly laid down. The Constitution of the Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council of the Labour Party is typical in stating that "The North-West District Organiser of the Labour Party shall act as Secretary to the Regional Council."⁽¹⁾ Regional organisers, like area agents, serve the Party leadership, not only by liaising directly with the centre on a wide variety of matters, but also by servicing the democratic organisation at the regional level, thereby providing a degree of supervision.

Personnel at the Regional and Area Level

Very little data is available on the origins, education and past careers of professional party organisers. In January 1971, a questionnaire (see Appendix B) was sent to all

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1. Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council of the Labour Party, Rules, Constitution and Standing Orders, p.8.

regional organisers and area agents to determine their backgrounds. An analysis of this questionnaire is provided in Appendix C which also contains some information on the nature of the appointment, pay, promotion and mobility of organisers. At this stage, however, it is appropriate to present brief profiles of regional and area staff, based on the responses to the questionnaire.

A typical Labour Party regional organiser attended elementary school, leaving at 14. He then went into industry and in his spare time attended technical college or else studied a correspondence course. He joined the Party at 18, having been brought up in a family in which his parents were politically active. After working in a voluntary capacity with the local party he entered the full-time agency service at the age of 32. He then served as Party agent in two constituencies for a total of about six years. At the age of 40 he was appointed assistant regional organiser, remaining at this level for some six years. Roughly twelve years after first entering the full-time agency service he became a regional organiser.

The average Conservative Party area agent attended either grammar or public school, leaving at 17, after which he had no form of further education. He joined the Party at 21, coming from a family background with little or no involvement in politics. He did not engage in any voluntary work for the local party but spent six and a half years in the army, followed by a short time in outside employment, before entering the agency service at the age of 26. He had an average of some two and a half constituency agencies, totalling nine and

a third years, before becoming a deputy area agent at the age of 40. He spent three years as a deputy before, some thirteen and a half years after first entering the agency service, he became an area agent. He will probably have served as area agent in two areas, spending about six years in the first and seven and a half years, to date, in his current area.

The National/Regional Relationship in the Labour Party

In the Labour Party the major organisational initiatives are taken by the National Executive Committee or, more specifically, by the Organisation Department at Transport House. The role of the regional organiser is to work within nationally determined frameworks of action, applying national policies to his region, and utilising local knowledge where appropriate. Some recent examples serve to illustrate the nature of the relationship between the Party's head office and the regional staff:

Firstly, regional organisers are given periodic directives concerning the selection of Prospective Parliamentary candidates. In May 1971, for example, the National Agent sent the following letter to all regional organisers:

"The NEC has decided that the selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates in the non-Labour constituencies and in those constituencies where the present Labour MP has intimated that he will not be seeking re-election should begin in June. It decided also that the elections should be dealt with on the basis of priorities. Will you please let me have as quickly as possible the list of constituencies within your region in which you propose that the first elections should take place on a priority basis. Meanwhile you are requested not to arrange to meet any constituency party to discuss selection procedure and a draft timetable until approval is given to your proposals for priorities."(1)

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1. Document sent to all regional organisers by the National Agent, Reference NAD/RQ/8/5/71.

Regional organisers are usually given a time limit by which all selections must be completed, but the precise order of the selection conferences is frequently left to the discretion of regional organisers, on the understanding that politically marginal constituencies must always receive priority.

Secondly, at strategic times, notably the period before an expected General Election, regional organisers are frequently instructed, at one of their half-yearly staff conferences, to concentrate their resources on marginal constituencies. The precise amount of time to be devoted to each constituency is left to the discretion of the individual organiser, although should the National Agent feel that a regional organiser is allocating resources incorrectly he will invariably send a directive requiring a change.

Thirdly, directives to organise membership campaigns within the regions are received frequently at regional office. Once again, the precise techniques to be adopted are left to the discretion of the regional organiser, provided that his detailed plans are compatible with the nationally determined framework of action.

Finally, regional organisers often receive instructions from Transport House to organise policy conferences. These meetings are imposed on the regions by the NUG, and regional organisers must involve themselves with the detailed administrative work associated with staging such conferences. One recent series of regional conferences was entitled "The Policies of the Labour Government" and between January and

November 1967 the North West regional office had 13 of these conferences to organise.(1) In the twelve months from June 1967 there were 19 policy conferences on a wide variety of topics in the West Midlands region,(2) while in the East Midlands 14 conferences were organised during the same period.(3)

As the field agents of the Labour Party's National Executive Committee regional organisers fulfil a wide variety of roles which can be illustrated with reference to specific examples:

Regional organisers must submit all local government election returns to Transport House in a particular format and at a predetermined time so that Party headquarters is in a position to make informed comments on the results to both press and television as quickly as possible. In addition detailed reports on all local government by-elections must be submitted to head office by the regional organiser.

Regional organisers are given detailed instructions by the National Agent at all Parliamentary by-elections. On occasions a regional organiser is obliged to act as election agent in preference to the local agent. A representative from head office attends all by-elections to offer advice on organisational matters which a regional organiser is almost duty bound to accept. Transport House also requires regional organisers to report at regular intervals on the work of constituency agents employed in the National Agency Scheme.(4)

1. 1968 North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.7.
2. 1968 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.4.
3. 1968 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.5.
4. The National Agency Scheme was established by the N.E.C. in 1969, and by 1970 there were some 40 constituency party agents employed in the scheme. A proportion of the salaries of these agents was paid by the N.E.C. In return, the National Party headquarters required to know in some detail the nature of the work carried out by these agents at the constituency party level.

These reports are detailed, containing information on the past, present and probable future work of the agents in question. Until March 1971 these reports had to be submitted each month, but since then Transport House has only demanded quarterly reports.

Regional organisers are directed to organise training meetings for key officers at both General and local government elections. Funds for these meetings are provided by party headquarters and frequently a head office representative is present. In matters such as these regional organisers are afforded little discretion. As the employees of the NEC they must abide by the instructions of the National Agent's department at Transport House.

Regional organisers represent the National Executive Committee in a variety of ways at the constituency level. The NEC must, according to the Party Constitution, be represented at all conferences connected with the selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates. It is obviously not deemed practical for someone from Transport House to travel to selection conferences throughout the country when there is an official representative within relatively easy reach of most constituencies. Often four visits by a regional organiser or one of his assistants are necessary before a candidate is finally selected. A constituency party cannot legitimately select a prospective Parliamentary candidate without a representative from the National Executive Committee being present.(1) In practice the NEC representative is invariably the regional organiser.

1. The Labour Party, Constitution and Rules, Section D, Clause XI, pp.13,14.

The redistribution of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in 1970 involved regional organisers in a considerable amount of work in their role as representatives of the NEC. In 1970-1 regional organisers represented the NEC at the various meetings associated with the closing down of old, and the establishment of new, constituency parties. Regional organisers frequently sent out the notices announcing selection conferences in those constituencies with sitting Labour members. They usually also wrote the minutes of the establishment conferences. Initially regional organisers met existing constituency officers to discuss the basis of representation for the establishment meetings in the newly created constituency parties: they discussed the assets and liabilities of the old parties; they dealt with the credentials of the delegates appointed to the establishment meetings. In these and similar matters regional staff acted as the representatives of the NEC, ensuring that all detailed arrangements were in line with nationally determined criteria.

From time to time the NEC instructs regional organisers to conduct enquiries on its behalf. These enquiries usually involve matters such as the expulsion of an individual member by a constituency party. At such enquiries the regional organiser is always assisted by members of his regional council (see Chapter 7). Regional organisers also represent the National Executive Committee at agency selection meetings. Constituency parties are unable to select full-time agents without an NEC representative being present. Invariably regional organisers attend in this capacity.

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Regional organisers are, therefore, allowed some scope to exercise initiative. Essentially, however, they act as the field agents of the NEC and as such are subject to close supervision by the centre. The degree of supervision is indicated by the 'reporting-in' system adopted by the Labour Party.

Regional organisers are obliged to report to the National Agent on each visit made, however brief, and whether it be to a constituency party, a local party, a trade union, or some other organisation. These reports are submitted on forms supplied by the Organisation Department at Transport House. Most regional organisers send between 300 and 400 reports to Head Office each year. This device is, of course, designed to keep the centre informed, in some detail, of the organisational situation at the constituency and local party levels throughout the country. Such reports are frequently part of an established field administrative network.

The Wilson Committee on Party Organisation (1955) deemed the reports unnecessary, but their use has continued. Wilson was concerned "at the volume of what we consider to be largely unnecessary paperwork. Reports from regional staff on visits are pouring into Transport House at the rate of at least 7 000 per annum. The task of reading (and dictating) the reports is in our view a wasteful use of headquarters and regional staff. Moreover, the very existence of the system creates a wrong relationship between head office and the regions based on a degree of over-centralisation which we should expect to find in a minor department of the War Office,

rather than in a great national Party."(1) Transport House has, however, firmly resisted the notion of monthly reports. The system of reporting every visit on a pre-printed form has enabled the centre to know in some detail what its field agents are doing. The centre has always been eager to retain the control which a system of reporting-in provides. The fact that this detailed reporting-in system is resented at the regional level does not appear to have made any significant impact.

The Wilson Report also commented on the infrequency of staff conferences:

"When the last conference was held, in June 1954, it was overloaded with an agenda of some 34 items, reflecting the excessive intervals between conferences. We find, for instance, one morning session organised as follows:

9.30 - 11 a.m. Marginal Constituencies

- a) Work accomplished and proposed plans.
- b) Appointment of agents (Document).
- c) Subsidised literature.
- d) N.A.L.S.O. Canvassing Teams 1954.
- e) Postal Vote Canvassers.
- f) Training of Agents and Key Workers.

11.15 - 12.45 p.m. Party Organisation

- a) Membership (Document).
- b) T.U. affiliations - National, Regional and Local
- c) Co-operative affiliations (Document).
- d) Constituency Party Finance (Document).
- e) Agency in General (Document).
- f) League of Youth.

Wilson remarked: "With such an agenda it is clear that there is no time for discussion or any two-way exchange of ideas:

1. Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on Party Organisation (The Wilson Report), 1955 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.68.

in general the time provided for each item could not allow for much more than a statement by the national officer concerned".(1)

By 1971 there was more contact between regional and national officials. There were, on average, two meetings each year between regional staff and the National Agent's department, as well as one meeting incorporating assistant regional organisers. Nevertheless, the frequency of the meetings was offset by the still overcrowded agendas which permitted little meaningful two-way flow of information. The following agenda, from the Regional Organisers Consultation held at Transport House on 29th March 1971 from 11 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. illustrates this point:

1. PARLIAMENTARY REDISTRIBUTION
 - a) Establishment of new constituency parties.
 - b) Endorsement of rules.
 - c) Resettlement of M.P.'s.
 - d) Selection of Parliamentary Candidates.
 - e) Finance, Outstanding Accounts
(Mr. D. Richards).
2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM
(Ann Carlton, Local Government Officer will attend this session).
 - a) Conservative Proposals (doc. Rd 78).
 - b) Boundaries, Functions and Politics
(doc. Rd 78).
 - c) Summary of R.O.'s Analysis of Political Implications (doc.).
3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS
 - a) Schedules.
 - b) Results.
 - c) Qualifications for Candidates (doc. M.M.S.O.).
4. CONSULTATIONS WITH LABOUR GROUPS.
5. SUBSIDIES FOR SCHOOLS ON PARTY ORGANISATION
6. BY-ELECTIONS.
7. CLOSURE 4.30 p.m. (2)

1. Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on Party Organisation (The Wilson Report) 1955 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.67.
2. Agenda, Regional Organisers' Consultation, 29/3/1971. The Conference chairman was the National Agent.

The overcrowded agenda was, then, just as evident in 1971 as it had been in 1954. There was still time for little more than a brief statement by a national officer. Information flowed only one way.

The National/Area Relationship in the Conservative Party

In the Conservative Party each of the eleven Area Offices acts as a branch of Central Office. In 1949 the Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (The Maxwell-Byfe Report), observed: "The composition of the Area Office... in contrast to the constituency offices, is under the direct control of Central Office".(1) The relationship between Central Office and the areas was examined by the Maxwell-Byfe Committee, which reported as follows:

"Is the Central Office agent under the orders of Central Office or of the Area Chairman? The Central Office agent is directly under the orders of the General Director, but in practice the Area Chairman and the Central Office agent both work together harmoniously in the pursuance of a common task.... It has been suggested that the Area Agents should be appointed from a panel approved by the Executive Committee of the National Union. We do not concur with this suggestion, but the Area Chairman should always be consulted before the appointment of any new Area Agent."(2)

Area agents administer a variety of national campaigns. The periodic membership drives, the occasional national fund-raising campaigns and the annual contracting-out campaign are examples. Broad strategies are announced nationally and area agents implement these directives, taking into account the local situation. Area agents must also deal with certain essential matters at the constituency level. The closing

1. Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (London: The National Union, 1949), p.20. (my italics).
2. *ibid.*, p.21.

down of old, and the setting up of new, parties following the 1970 Conservative Government's Re-distribution Act is a specific example. In this matter, area agents were given detailed instructions by Central Office concerning procedure, but at the same time they were allowed flexibility over the precise timing, provided that the whole operation was completed by 31st March 1972.

Much of the preliminary work associated with the appointment of full-time constituency association agents is handled at the area level, thereby relieving Central Office of routine administration. The role played by area office in the allocation of speakers for constituency and branch meetings again eases pressure on Central Office. In the West Midlands Area, for example, large numbers of speakers have been allocated by the area office in recent years:

1965-6	395	1966-7	390
1967-8	369	1968-9	436 (1)

Routine work is left to the "branches" of Central Office.

The extensive results service provided by Central Office during local government elections receives much of its information from area agents. During General Elections, contact between Central Office and the area agents is particularly close. In the 1970 General Election, area staff were instructed to telephone the Director of Organisation at a pre-determined time each day. "Intelligence" material was fed to Central Office from the constituencies via the area agents; unimportant information could, thus, be sifted at the area level. The detailed nature of the control exercised by

1. West Midlands Conservative Council Annual Reports, 1965-70.

Central Office over its field agents was well illustrated during the 1970 General Election when area agents were instructed to obtain six specimen copies of all opposition literature in each constituency and send it to head office where it could be examined in detail. This was not a request; it was a command.(1)

The minutes of every area committee are sent to London, thereby enabling Head Office to follow through any points of interest and to keep informed on developments in each provincial area. In contrast to the Labour Party, however, there is no formal system of 'reporting-in' to Central Office on every assignment. The "reporting-in" system in the Conservative Party is much more flexible. Each area agent is required to report to Central Office about Parliamentary Selection Conferences and Agency Selection Conferences. Apart from these, however, an experienced area agent will only transmit information to Central Office when he feels that headquarters should be informed, given the likelihood of enquiries on the matter from elsewhere. The contrast with the Labour Party should not, however, be drawn too sharply. Central Office is linked to each area office by a Telex system. One could argue that this network (not present in the Labour Party) facilitates closer, albeit more informal, contact between Central Office and the area offices, than is obtainable through the extensive form-filling system of the Labour Party.

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1. This task was not as simple as it might appear. In the West Midlands, for example, where opposition literature often proved difficult to obtain, typists from area office were sent, disguised as students, in search of the necessary quota of leaflets.

By moving the area agents round from area to area every eight years or so, the Conservative Party conforms to what is accepted field administrative practice. This prevents an agent from becoming too attached to a locality, at the expense of his loyalty to the centre. In the West Midlands, however, the area agent Mr. J. Galloway, has been in the area from 1956 until 1971 and, it seems, will remain there until his retirement some four years hence. Personal reasons have dictated this unusually long stay in a single region. Galloway, the exception to the rule, has proved the most independent of the three area agents examined in this thesis, and, by repute, one of the most independent of all Conservative Party area agents. For example, Galloway has raised a regional fund with which he has financed a series of organisational innovations in the area. This project was not received very enthusiastically at Central Office. In 1970, Galloway reported:

"For some years I have been able to launch the following schemes in selected constituencies:-

- a) Poster boards for use during the General Election campaign.
- b) Letters from Members of Parliament to all electors on the 'B' list on House of Commons note paper in House of Commons envelopes, sealed.
- c) In the year immediately before the election, letters to new young voters.
- d) Letters to association members regarding postal votes.
- e) Appropriate communications to selected opinion-forming personnel."⁽¹⁾

In addition, Galloway financed propaganda newspapers for a time in selected marginal constituencies. Despite Galloway's

1. J. Galloway, Report to the Half Yearly Meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Council, 24th October 1970.

relatively independent line with Central Office on some issues, all area agents have the same basic relationship with the centre. They are field administrative agents for Central Office and are accountable to the party leadership.

Conservative area agents are used far more widely than Labour Party regional organisers for taking soundings of opinion in the country. This "intelligence" service is, of course, used most intensively during General Elections, but even in non-election periods area agents are occasionally instructed by Central Office to take soundings of opinion at the local level. "Intelligence" in the Conservative Party assumes far greater significance at area level than it does at the regional level in the Labour Party. The relative abundance of full-time constituency agents in the Conservative Party enables area agents to concentrate on intelligence work, while their Labour Party opposite numbers are, because of the lack of skilled agents at the local level, involved in much more routine organisational work.⁽¹⁾ In the transmission of ideas upwards from local to national levels area agents are more fully utilised than Labour Party regional organisers.

Summary

Within the nationally determined frameworks of action both regional organisers and area agents are afforded some initiative. While the relationship of Conservative area agents with Central Office differs slightly from that of regional organisers with Transport House, the essential similarity

1. In 1970 the Labour Party employed 141 full-time constituency agents, compared with 386 in the Conservative Party.

remains. Both parties employ their regional staff to act as field agents for the respective leaderships. As field agents, regional and area staff are the "eyes and ears" of the party leaderships. The major reason for the development and maintenance of a network of field administration in the Labour and Conservative Parties has, however, been administrative convenience. The degree of control exercised by the respective head offices over their regional and area officials does not indicate that the two parties are highly centralised. There is no evidence to show that the chain of command extends beyond the regional and area organisers to the constituency parties. In both parties constituency associations are proud of their relative autonomy. Directives from the regional offices are frequently ignored by constituency parties as will be shown in Chapters 4 and 5. The chain of command from the centre ends at the regional level.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONSTITUENCY/REGIONAL RELATIONSHIP IN ACTION

Regional and area staff are involved in a wide variety of work as the field agents of their respective head offices. While some of this work affects all constituencies (such as that involved in the selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates), much of it is highly selective, focussing on constituencies with, for example, weak organisation, a critical financial situation, an internal crisis, or a by-election. Because the range of work is vast a classification has been adopted to bring order out of chaos. All classifications are somewhat arbitrary, and the functional categories adopted in this chapter are open to question. Work at the regional and area level is considered under the following four headings: Regulatory, Conciliatory, Advisory and Servicing. The work which regional and area staff are specifically concerned with during a General Election is dealt with separately in Chapter 8.

1. REGULATORY

(a) Selection of Parliamentary Candidates.

In a number of matters regional and area staff act as the representatives of their respective head offices and try to ensure that approved procedures are adhered to at the constituency level. The regulatory role played by regional and area staff in the process of selecting prospective Parliamentary candidates is extremely important.

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According to Professor Austin Ranney, "The selection of parliamentary candidates is one of the least discussed and

most recondite of the interlocking mysteries that make up the British system of Government. Labour regional organisers play, if anything, an even more active role in candidate selection than do Conservative area agents." (1) Ranney quotes one regional organiser thus:

"Every now and again Hugh Gaitskell, who knows me and trusts me, tells me privately, "Look, young X is a very able chap and we could use him to good purpose in the House. Would you see what you can do for him?" When he does, I review the situation in all parties in my region carefully. If I see one that is winnable, and that has officers who are good friends of mine, I drive over and have a quiet chat with them. Usually they can at least guarantee that my man will get on the short list, and sometimes they can also see to it that he is the only able man on the list. After that, of course, it's up to the man himself, to convince the selection conference that he's what they want. But they usually do rather well." Ranney adds, "This particular organiser has scored several triumphs, but by no means all of his eleven colleagues have been equally successful". (2)

While this appraisal is rather too simple, it does provide a useful insight into the informal procedures which operate at the regional level. Ranney, unlike Rush, (3) concentrates on more than simply the selection conference itself. By focussing on the final selection conferences it is hardly surprising to find Rush concluding that regional organisers are little more than procedural and constitutional advisors. Rush observes that: "In practice the regional organiser or other N.E.C. representative holds a watching brief over selection meetings, acting as a guide on procedure and a guarantor of the efficiency of the selection and, as the assistant national organiser

1. A. Ranney, Pathways to Parliament, London, 1965, pp.3,132.
2. *ibid.*, pp.143,144.
3. M.D. Rush, The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates in the Conservative and Labour Parties, Ph.D. Thesis, Sheffield, 1965; also, The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates, London, 1969.

pointed out in 1956, 'no officer or representative of the N.E.C. should be allowed to speak on the merits or demerits of the nominee'. (Labour Organiser, January 1956, p.13)"(1) Throughout his analysis Rush views the role of the regional organiser purely in formal terms. In doing so he fails to recognise the informal backroom manoeuvring which invariably accompanies selection. While the formal role is important, it is wrong to give the impression that regulations are the sole concern of a regional organiser at this particular time. The formal role must be seen in its proper perspective.

A regional organiser is closely involved in discussions at the constituency level concerning the timetable of selection. Throughout the selection process he acts as the representative of the N.E.C., checking procedure, ensuring the validity of nomination forms and appointed delegates, and in every way checking that the procedure outlined by the N.E.C. is followed as closely as possible. Rush examines three selection conferences in some detail: Newark, Bromley and Birkenhead. All three were prior to the 1964 General Election.

Referring to the Bromley selection Rush observes:

"The Regional Organiser for the Southern Region of the Labour Party, who acted as the representative of the N.E.C., confined his role to that of procedural advisor. Only once, when a question was asked about sponsorship, did he make a categorical statement..... there was no sign that the C.L.P. had had any great experience of selection and the local officials relied heavily on the Regional Organiser for advice."(2)

1. M.D. Rush, The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates, London, 1969, p.135.

2. M.D. Rush, Thesis, op.cit., pp.453-457.

In both Newark and Birkenhead the regional organisers were seen to play similar procedural roles.

There is, however, some evidence to indicate that regional organisers often play a part in securing Labour Party candidates for safe Conservative seats. Frequently such constituency parties contact regional office and ask for possible candidates. It is in such "hopeless" Labour seats that regional office appears most able to exert influence. Mr. A.A. Johnson, assistant organiser in the North West Region observed that in both Lancashire and Cheshire "Regional influence is greatest in safe Conservative seats".(1)

A regional organiser may also be influential at the short-listing stage of selection. In a constituency where some 30 or 40 names have been submitted for consideration, the regional organiser is frequently asked for guidance. At this stage, therefore, he can often virtually ensure that his nominee is shortlisted. He must proceed with circumspection in all seats, however, since, in most circumstances, overt regional backing for a particular candidate can be fatal: "The region must avoid pressing for one candidate too hard, otherwise the likelihood is that he might not even get shortlisted".(2)

Rush provides a useful analysis of the role of a Conservative area agent at a prospective Parliamentary candidate selection conference. He examines Croydon Conservative Association prior to the 1964 General Election. At the selection meetings:

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1. A.A. Johnson, interview, 19/12/68.
 2. A.A. Johnson, interview, 19/12/68.

"The discussion which led to the final short-list was held after the last of the interviews. At the suggestion of the Central Office Area Agent, who attended the meetings of the selection committee in an advisory capacity, an immediate vote was taken to reduce the fifteen to a more manageable number. This resulted in a short-list of six names.

"The Area Agent again intervened and advised the Committee that their main consideration should be to select a short-list of persons whom they felt were 'best suited to the constituency and not those who had impressed them most'. He went on to point out that 'a mistake was made at Orpington' where the selected candidate would have made an excellent M.P. but 'was not the right man for the constituency'.(1) Rush later notes "Only where he gave procedural advice did the Area Agent urge a particular course upon the committee and his comments on the applicants were either non-committal or designed to ensure that justice was being done to a particular individual. There was no indication that he was attempting to secure the selection, or prevent the rejection of one or more of the applicants. Nor, during the short break that occurred, did the Area Agent attempt to exert any informal or indirect pressure".(2)

Formally, constituency associations are autonomous in the process of candidate selection. This was made clear by Mr. Richard Sharples (Vice Chairman of the Party Organisation) in a debate at the 1968 Conservative Party Conference:

"The choice of how you select a candidate and the choice of the methods which you adopt is yours, that of the constituency association, alone. We at Central Office are there to help constituencies if they ask us to do so. But I agree very much with one speaker. It would be quite wrong, and it has never been the policy of Central Office, certainly in recent times, to try to foist particular candidates upon constituencies. To do so would be not only wrong from our point of view but would be damming for the particular candidate whose chances were being advocated in that way".(3)

In theory, therefore, Conservative Party area agents, like Labour Party regional organisers, only have a formal role to play in the selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates.

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1. M.D. Rush, Thesis, op.cit., pp.155,156.
 2. M.D. Rush, Thesis, op.cit., p.160.
 3. 1968 Conservative Party Annual Conference Report, p.77.

In practice, however, they have more than a purely formal task. Their influence is greatest at the preliminary and the shortlisting stages. The East Midlands area agent asserted that "You can usually get people on a shortlist unless on paper they look very bad." He added, however, that he would "never try to influence the final decision." (1)

Ranney is incorrect, if only marginally so, in asserting that "He, (the area agent) also, as a matter of routine, attends the selection conferences in his area...." (2)

Generally this is true, but there are exceptions, notably in the West Midlands area where, in 1970, neither the Birmingham constituencies nor Smethwick, invited the area agent to their selection conferences. (3) The absence of the area agent does not invalidate the selection, a position which contrasts with that in the Labour Party. To claim too much influence for area agents in the process of candidate selection would be unwise. It is equally misconceived, however, to underestimate the undoubted reality of informal influence.

Linked with candidate selection is the re-nomination of sitting members. At the height of the Bevanite rebellion in the mid-1950's two constituency Labour parties tried to drop right-wing candidates but were prevented from doing so by

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1. P.K. Livingston, interview, 28/1/71.
 2. A. Ranney, op.cit., p.29.
 3. Traditionally, the city of Birmingham constituencies do not invite the area agent to selection meetings. The city Party Agent, is, however, usually present at selection meetings within the city. In the Smethwick constituency Central Office was opposed to the adoption of the likely prospective Parliamentary candidate for the 1970 General Election so the constituency simply selected another candidate without an Area office representative being present.

Transport House, notably the regional organisers. In June 1954 the General Management Committee of Liverpool Exchange Constituency Labour Party decided to dismiss their M.P., Bessie Braddock,..... It was left to the North West regional organiser, R. Wallis, to inform the constituency party that it had acted unconstitutionally. Wallis told them that if they refused to re-adopt Mrs. Braddock the N.E.C. might be forced to disaffiliate the existing Exchange party and form a new one. Eventually Exchange was persuaded to adopt Mrs. Braddock, albeit against its will.(1)

At Coventry South in 1955 a similar episode occurred when the constituency party refused to adopt Elaine Burton as candidate. The N.E.C. refused to accept the sacking and eventually Miss Burton was re-adopted and re-elected in 1955. In both the Liverpool Exchange and the Coventry South instances regional organisers had important roles to play as the representatives of Transport House.(2)

(b) Selection of Constituency Agents

Regional organisers and area agents play a role in the appointment of full-time constituency party agents. No constituency Labour Party may advertise for a full-time agent without the prior approval of the regional organiser. A regional organiser must be satisfied that a constituency party is financially able to support an agent and to this end he will examine the financial statements and balance sheets of the party in question before giving approval for the party to go

1. Liverpool Daily Post. April 28 1955, p.1; April 29, p.7.
2. For detailed accounts of both these episodes see A. Ranney, op.cit., pp.188-191.

ahead and advertise for an agent. The following report provides an indication of the nature of a regional investigation. It also illustrates the representations which a regional organiser frequently makes to head office. The report concerns a visit made by the West Midlands regional organiser to the Burton-on-Trent constituency Labour Party in May 1969:

"Their present financial position is as follows:-

Because they have cleared all their liabilities they are beginning to build up some funds and have a balance in their current account of £420.

The freehold property they own has been renovated with the ground floor used for Party Offices and the upper floors used for five modern flatlets.

There is £700 outstanding on the mortgage which has 15 years to run, but they are hoping to clear it completely long before that term of years.

The flats bring in a weekly income of £18.15.0. and after all outgoings including rates, mortgage repayments, Corporation tax etc., they are making about £200 a year profit from the property.

They have a constituency tote realising a profit of £500 a year.

They have built up their participation in the Golden Prize Club largely through the initiative of Ron Truman and will have an annual income of at least £200 a year from this source.

There is a Labour Club in the Stapenhill ward within the Borough of Burton although this is not a Labour Party Club. Recently the ownership of the premises has been taken over by the Constituency Labour Party and the Club is paying £50 a year rent. There are good chances that this Club will become very prosperous and in consequence a higher rent is likely in the future.

In a normal voting pattern I am convinced that organisation would make all the difference, in winning this seat.

A grant at a rate of £400 a year would make it certain that they could manage to start an agency and I hope such a grant would be possible.

With both the Candidate and the Treasurer ready to try all sorts of new ideas this Party could become a very good example to many others.

If the grant is available I have been authorised by the Party to arrange for the necessary advertisements for the vacancy."(1)

It is the regional organiser who inserts the advertisement in the party's own Journal, the Labour Organiser. The regional organiser must meet the constituency party executive committee to sift through the applications and to draw up a shortlist. Informally considerable manoeuvring invariably goes on behind the scenes. One organiser remarked "We tout round quietly where we want someone badly for a constituency".(2) Another regional organiser asserted, "One has got to make sure the right people apply."(3) Formally, a regional organiser must follow the various N.E.C. directives at every stage of the selection process. At the same time, however, the informal aspects of the job must be recognised.

A regional organiser will usually visit a new constituency agent and provide some guidelines about the job. Following the appointment of a new agent to the Rushcliffe constituency in December 1969 the East Midlands regional organiser duly visited the agent: "I discussed with him what I consider to be the priorities in organization in the constituency.

These were:-

- (a) To build up the tote scheme
- (b) The selection of County Council and Urban District Council candidates; and
- (c) Training schemes for key workers".(4)

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1. Report to Head Office, West Midlands Regional Organiser, Reference: M 365, Date of visit, 21/5/1969.
 2. W. Burley, interview, 1/11/70.
 3. J. Cattermole, interview, 19/11/70.
 4. Report to Head Office, East Midlands Regional Organiser, Reference: Rushcliffe L345. Date of visit, 9/12/69.

The provision of such advice is particularly marked in constituencies employing National Agency Service Agents.(1)

Conservative Party area agents also play a role in the recruitment training and deployment of constituency association agents. An aspiring constituency agent usually is put into contact with the area agent who takes full particulars of each candidate, and if deemed suitable, these are sent to the Personnel Officer at Central Office who is also secretary of the Agents' Examination Board. The candidate is then entered for the preliminary examination. Frequently, area agents deliberately exaggerate the drawbacks of the agency service in order to deter weak candidates. Often an area agent will ask a candidate with little experience of voluntary work in the party to spend some time in this capacity before entering the agency service. Candidates who pass the preliminary examination are sent for training in a constituency. The secretary of the Examination Board, along with the area agent, decides in which constituency the candidate should train. It appears that the Examinations Secretary usually takes the advice of the area agent, although on occasions the area agent is overruled by the Head Office official.(2)

A constituency association requiring an agent usually contacts area office. The area agent arranges for an advertisement to be sent forward to the personnel officer at Central Office who each week circulates the list of vacancies to those

1. The National Agency Service was established by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee in 1969 to try and ensure that key marginal constituencies had full-time agents for the forthcoming General Election. The party set aside £50,000 for three years to help finance agents in 43 constituencies.
2. J. Galloway, interview, 9.12.69.

agents and constituency parties who have requested it. All applications are sent direct to Central Office and thence to the area agent who, in his turn, sends the names to a constituency association. Central Office will frequently suggest a preference to the area agent but, as in the selection of Parliamentary candidates, constituency associations can refuse to accept advice offered by the area.

(c) Parliamentary Redistribution

Regional organisers and area agents act as the representatives of their respective Head Offices in the work associated with Parliamentary redistribution. Redistribution is, of course, relatively infrequent. In the post-war years there have been only two major redistributions, in 1948 and in 1970, although there were minor changes to constituency boundaries during the 1950's. During a redistribution, old parties must be closed down and new parties must be established. Regional organisers and area agents supervise the work, ensuring that the guide lines laid down by the centre are adhered to.

In 1970 the Labour Party's National Agent wrote to his regional organisers "giving an A - Z on how it (reorganisation) should be carried out. Everywhere they go they represent the N.E.C." (1) Regional organisers were given a timetable within which they were expected to work. They had the task of galvanising constituency parties into action quickly, given that the N.E.C. wanted the new parties to be established as soon as possible. Much of the preliminary work was started

1. Mr. R. Hayward, National Agent, the Labour Party, interview, 11/11/70.

prior to the redistribution bill becoming law. In the West Midlands region, for example, the following circular was sent to constituency party secretaries in October 1970:

"You have recently had correspondence from the National Agent of the Labour Party in connection with the Redistribution of Parliamentary constituencies.

"Until Parliament has made a final decision about the Order bringing into being the new or altered constituencies, we cannot officially commence the procedure to set up the new Party structure involved. We are already well under way with consultations with the present constituency organisations involved in major changes but so that all Constituency Parties know how we shall be tackling this involved subject, I set out below which areas we shall consider as major or minor changes. Those with minor changes will be asked to re-arrange their Parties in consultation with those neighbouring Parties involved."(1)

The initial meetings of the new constituency parties had to be called by the N.E.C. In effect, this meant that regional office did most of the work. (See Chapter 3 for details of the work.) In the words of one regional organiser it was "a massive job."(2) Redistribution also involves the closing down of old parties, a task which poses major problems for a regional organiser, particularly where large debts or assets are involved. It is usual practice for constituency parties involved in re-organisation to decide amongst themselves how their assets should be divided up. The regional organiser then checks the balance sheets of the constituencies concerned to ensure that the distribution has been fair. Debts pose a particularly difficult problem since no new party is anxious to take them over. Regional office is concerned that all new parties begin on a sound financial footing and the regional

1. West Midlands Regional Office. Circular to West Midlands Constituency Party Secretaries, October 1970.
2. L.R. Chamberlain, interview. 19/1/71.

organiser invariably attempts to persuade the R.E.C. to write off debts.

Conservative Party area agents also provide assistance to constituency associations involved in Parliamentary re-distribution. In 1970, when the Boundary Commission proposals were finally accepted by Parliament, a detailed guide was sent from Central Office to every constituency agent. This provided advice concerning the procedure to be adopted by constituency associations. As in the Labour Party, the area agent has an important role to play in closing down old parties and in establishing new associations. Central Office stipulated that all new constituency associations should be established by 31st March 1972. Given this broad directive, area agents were able to proceed at their own pace, provided that they followed the procedural instructions set out by Central Office. The East Midlands area agent proceeded apace, but the North East and West Midlands area agents were more cautious in their approach. While the East Midlands agent took the initiatives in his area, the other two area agents were content to let the initiatives come from the constituencies.

(d) By-Elections

Labour Party regional organisers are responsible to the National Executive Committee for the conduct of all by-elections in their respective regions. Similarly, Conservative area agents are responsible to the Director of Organisation for the running of by-elections. In both parties, this entails much time being spent in constituencies where by-elections are pending. Some examples serve to illustrate this point: The East Midlands regional organiser worked in the Mellingborough

constituency from 14th November to the 5th December 1961, (the by-election was held on 4th December). At the Newcastle-under-Lyme by-election in October 1969, the West Midlands area agent worked in the constituency from 14th - 30th October, although he was not election agent.

Transport House encourages regional organisers to act as election agents in all by-elections, except where there is a competent full-time agent in the constituency. In practice, however, organisers vary in their adherence to this advice. In the fourteen by-elections in the North West region between 1956 and 1965 the regional organiser acted as the election agent in twelve. This contrasts with the West Midlands where the regional organiser has been far less concerned to exercise formal control. In the years 1953 to 1969 there were fourteen by-elections in the West Midlands, and the regional organiser acted as election agent in only six. On occasions, however, the National Agent of the Labour Party insists that the regional organiser act as election agent. At the Leicester North East by-election in 1962 the National Agent so insisted, although the regional organiser had already earmarked a local person for the job. However, a regional organiser has little alternative but to comply with instructions from headquarters.

Whether or not a regional organiser acts as election agent he is still a key figure in an election campaign. It is his duty to secure personnel for the campaign. He must supervise the full-time agents who come to help in the constituency as well as the assistant regional organisers from other regions who are drafted in by the National Executive

Committee. At the Bassetlaw by-election (31st October 1968) there was a total of 29 full-time agents and organisers working in the constituency.(1) The regional organiser determines how best to utilise this aid. When a regional organiser does not act as election agent he frequently assumes the role of canvass officer. He is then responsible for co-ordinating and directing the canvas throughout the constituency.

A regional organiser also has the responsibility of securing help from neighbouring constituencies. This is frequently a very difficult job, particularly if the constituency borders on another region. This problem was highlighted in the Wellingborough by-election (14/12/69). In his report on the campaign, the East Midlands regional organiser wrote:

"I think we only had the help of two people from the Eastern Region during the campaign, and this region joins the constituency, in spite of all our efforts, and nobody came from Bedford, which is actually nearer to the constituency than any other place, apart from the Member of Parliament."(2)

Virtually all the assistance in the by-election came from other constituencies within the East Midlands region. Cross-regional exchange appears to be almost non-existent in the Labour Party.

Whether or not a regional organiser is appointed election agent for a by-election makes little difference to his actual

1. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Report to Head Office on the Bassetlaw by-election. Reference number L.34.
2. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Report to Head Office on the Wellingborough by-election (14/12/69) Reference Number L.328.

role. It is his task to supervise the campaign on behalf of the N.E.C. The amount of time taken up in dealing with by-elections varies from year to year. Each by-election involves about three weeks away from the office, and a series of by-elections can, therefore, be extremely time consuming. In addition, assistant regional organisers are seconded by the National Agent's Department to assist in by-elections in other regions. Taken together, regional staff spend a high proportion of their time dealing with by-election work. In the East Midlands region in 1967 there were two by-elections. Out of a total of 322 engagements in 1967, the East Midlands regional organiser spent 46 at Parliamentary by-elections. The assistant regional organiser spent 118 out of 264 visits, and the woman assistant regional organiser spent 86 out of 338 visits on by-election work. This amounts to 12, 40, and 25 respectively, of their engagements during the year 1967.(1)

Conservative Party area agents never formally act as election agents in Parliamentary by-elections. When there is no local constituency agent the job is taken on by a deputy area agent. For example, in the Wellingborough by-election, already cited (4/12/69), the East Midlands deputy area agent acted as election agent in the absence of a local party agent. This strategy has been adopted because election agents are required to attend to a whole range of legal technicalities during a campaign (such as work connected with postal ballots, nomination papers, control of expenditures) and Central Office believes that for an area agent to be engaged in such work is

1. Figures taken from East Midlands Regional Office, evidence to the Simpson Committee on Party Organisation, 1968.

a misuse of resources. This routine work is delegated to other people, thereby enabling the area agent to concentrate on directing and co-ordinating the campaign.

The degree of intervention by an area agent at a by-election varies according to local circumstances. Little action is required where the local machine is working satisfactorily. On the other hand, when an area agent is not entirely satisfied with the state of local party organisation he will often work in the constituency during the whole of the campaign. In addition the organisational help provided from neighbouring constituencies is the responsibility of area office. Lacking formal authority, the area agent must appeal in a reasonable manner to local constituencies, otherwise he will invariably receive little or no help. The area agent is also directly involved in the provision of speakers for the campaign. He is particularly important as a broker between the constituency and the Speakers Department at Head Office. Inexperienced candidates often rely on the area agent for briefings prior to press conferences and other engagements. Again, though, the area agent's precise role varies according to the needs of the constituency in question.

(e) Local Government Elections

During local government elections, regional organisers concentrate on the politically important local authorities. In 1969 in the West Midlands region, for example, every major local authority with one exception, Stoke, was solidly Conservative. Regional office, therefore, put in a great deal of work at Stoke prior to the 1969 local government elections.

The assistant regional organiser spent three months in Stoke during which time he modernised the election machinery, designed a broadsheet, held schools on party organisation, and dealt with policy statements. In brief, he organised the whole campaign. In marginal areas regional office frequently supervises preparations for the campaign. Regional office also collates local government election results and forwards them to Transport House.

The shortage of Labour Party constituency agents means a great deal of extra work for the regional staff in local government matters.⁽¹⁾ In Derbyshire in 1970, for example, there was not a single full-time agent. Much of the routine work carried out by regional office in February and March 1970 would not have been necessary had there been even one full-time agent in the county to co-ordinate the work. The regional office staff even had to deal personally with ensuring that nomination forms were filled in. Finding candidates to stand in "hopeless" areas was also a time-consuming task, but one which had to be done if at all possible. The presence of "stooge" candidates meant that opposition forces could not be thrown in their entirety into nearby marginal constituencies.

The production of broadsheets, particularly for County Council Elections, is frequently undertaken by regional office. In the 1964 County Council Elections in the North West region "a four-page pictorial leaflet, in two colours, with space for the candidate's photograph and message were produced and supplied as requested. The leaflets were heavily subsidised...

1. In 1970 the Labour Party had only 141 full-time constituency agents compared to the Conservative Party's 386.

The leaflets proved very popular and nearly 600,000 were produced and circulated.(1) In 1970 the East Midlands regional organiser produced a County broadsheet for Nottinghamshire, politically the most important county in his region.

Occasionally, County Council by-elections attract some publicity, hence the effort put in by regional office to help ensure a good performance. The following extract gives some indication of the seriousness with which County Council by-elections can be regarded by regional organisers:

"(On 30th June 1969) I was present at a meeting of the Arnold Local Labour Party which was discussing arrangements for a Nottinghamshire County Council by-election in the Beetwood Division.

General Remarks:

This is a seat they held from 1945 to 1967 and I am anxious that a well organised campaign is conducted, as it should be possible to regain the seat. Arrangements for the campaign were made and I have already written to County Councillors and local parties in the area, stressing the importance of helping in this by-election..... I intend to watch the development of the campaign to make sure that an effective effort is put in."(2)

Conservative Party area agents involve themselves in all local government elections, except parish council elections. They have a general supervisory role, providing a network of services and advice to candidates and local parties. The area office works with Conservative Central Office in providing assistance. The publicity department at Central Office sends out dummy election addresses, hints on publicity, and similar information. Legal forms come direct from Central

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1. 1965 North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.16.
 2. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Report to Head Office, Reference Carlton K 32, Date 30.6.69.

Office as do notes for the guidance of candidates. Despite the direct involvement of Central Office, area office remains important during local government elections.

As in the Labour Party, area agents must ensure that candidates are adopted in as many wards as possible. In County Council elections area agents play a supervisory and a co-ordinating role. In every county in the West Midlands Area (except Lincolnshire, where all Conservatives fought as Independents) the area staff had a series of meetings with constituency chairman, agents and leaders of Conservative groups, about policy for the 1970 election campaign. In Borough and Urban/Rural District Council elections preparations are usually dealt with by the local constituency association agent. Counties, however, cover a large number of constituencies. Someone must get the various units together to discuss policy. By default the task has fallen to the area agent.

As in the Labour Party, effort is concentrated on the politically marginal counties. In the West Midlands the area agent has traditionally concentrated on Staffordshire, while in the East Midlands, the area agent produces the broadsheet for Nottinghamshire. The North West area, however, has the biggest local authority outside London, namely Lancashire County Council. Given the finely balanced political nature of the county, a great deal of work is put in by area office. A broadsheet is produced and sold from area office, which deals also with all the duplicating for the candidates' briefing notes. The main task, however, is editing the policy statement for the County Council elections. The area agent edits the reports submitted by the chairman of each

policy committee of the Conservative group, and presents a draft statement for approval.

The Local Government results service provided by Central Office is supplied with much of its information by area agents. Each area agent is required to collate the area's results in a prescribed manner and to transmit them to Central Office in accordance with instructions issued by the Organisation department. Area office again acts as the intermediary between the party in the country and Head Office, passing information up from the localities at the request of the leadership. Local party efforts are supervised by area staff in accordance with Head Office norms.

2. CONCILIATORY

In any grouping, political or social, disputes inevitably arise from time to time. Both regional organisers and area agents arbitrate in such circumstances. In addition, regional organisers are occasionally required to represent the National Executive Committee on enquiries at the local or constituency party level. Disputes occasionally arise between local parties and party groups on the Council; they also occur between party members. In short, there are many potential sources of conflict within local parties. When trouble flares, regional staff initially act as brokers between the disputing factions. In the event of a regional organiser failing to satisfy both parties, either side in the dispute may call for an official enquiry by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee. Usually, however, informal intervention by the regional organiser is sufficient to calm troubled waters. In April 1969 the East Midlands regional organiser wrote:

"I was present (on 2.4.69) at a meeting of the Blithworth Local Party (in the Newark Constituency), where difficulties had arisen between the Local Party and Labour councillors on the Southwell Rural District Council regarding an increase in Council house rents and an amendment to the agreements between tenants and the local council.

"It seemed to me that basically this was a dispute between the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, as the meeting lined up on this basis. I think, as a result of a bit of straight talking by both the Agent and myself, the Local Party now see the matter in a different light and I am hoping the problem will be resolved." (1)

To take another example, this time from the West Midlands region: in November 1969 the regional organiser visited the Meriden Constituency Labour Party

"To meet the Constituency Party Executive Committee and the officers of the Kingshurst Local Labour Party to try to reconcile differences between the Local Party and the constituency.

"We had a very lengthy discussion on this long standing dispute. It goes back a few years and is really based on personal clashes with Mr. T. Hayes, the Secretary of the Local Labour Party.

"I hope we cleared the air and that the Local Party and the Constituency Party will find it possible to co-operate in a much better spirit in the future.

"The minor points which cause the arguments are enlarged because of the very considerable problems both the Constituency and the Local Party have to face in this rapidly expanding constituency where a new population of over 50,000 people will be created within three years." (2)

Occasionally, however, regional organisers are unable to reach a satisfactory settlement. An appeal by one of the dissenting parties to the National Executive Committee obligates the N.E.C. to set up a formal enquiry to examine the problem. In most instances, Head Office will ask the regional council to conduct the enquiry, particularly if the matter is a purely

1. West Midlands Regional Organiser. Report to Head Office. Reference Newark, L 344. Date, 2.4.69.
2. West Midlands Regional Organiser. Report to Head Office. Reference M 420. Date 25.11.69.

local issue (such as a party member being expelled by the local constituency party). The regional organiser must arrange the hearing and take the minutes. He himself, however, will rarely act as one of the judges, since he will invariably have been involved in the dispute at an earlier stage. Three members of the regional council usually conduct these local enquiries which are, in any event, few and far between. (There appear, on average, to be about two such enquiries a year in each of the three regions being examined.) A typical regional enquiry was that on February 18th 1969 in the East Midlands into the refusal of the Mansfield Constituency Labour Party to accept a Mr. J. Thierry into membership.⁽¹⁾ At other times, enquiries consist of a combination of regional and national representatives. Very occasionally, an enquiry is conducted purely by national personnel. The formal position of regional organisers is, however, relatively unimportant when compared to the troubleshooting role of arbitrating in local party disputes before they reach the enquiry stage. Being an outsider, a regional organiser can often restore unity before any permanent damage is done.

Formally, Conservative Party area agents do not have an important role to play in settling disputes within the party. Their role is outlined in the rules of each area council. In the West Midlands, for example, the rules state:

"The officers of the Council shall give decisions upon or take such steps as they think fit to bring about a settlement of any dispute or difference submitted by the Executive Council of any Constituency Association or Central Council of a

1. Information taken from a Report to Head Office by the East Midlands Regional Organiser. Reference, Mansfield, L 343, date 18.2.69.

divided Borough (being a member of the National Union). If the officers of the Council shall fail to bring about a settlement acceptable to all parties to the dispute or difference the Executive Council of the Association or Central Association of a divided Borough may (and shall if so requested by any Branch of the Association) submit such dispute or difference to the Executive Committee of the National Union, which may give a decision thereon or take such steps as it thinks fit to bring about a settlement. Any decision given in writing under the hand of the Chairman for the time being of the Executive Committee of the National Union shall be final and conclusive."(1)

As an officer of the Council the area agent is entitled to attend any enquiry. Usually, however, he does not attend. For diplomatic reasons most area agents appear to remain uninvolved in official disputes. In any event, they are few and far between. The West Midlands area provides a convenient example. At the Executive Committee meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Council, held on the 24th October 1970, the area agent reported that "he had received a letter from Mr. R. Millard, Chairman of the Bromsgrove Divisional Conservative Association stating that the Crabbs Cross Branch of his Association had declared a dispute and he, therefore, was committing the matter to the West Midlands Area."(2) A committee of three was appointed to deal with the matter. The deputy area agent for the West Midlands acted as the Secretary of the Committee. Formally, area agents "have no authority to arbitrate in any disputes in the Conservative Party. We can offer advice or occasionally 'bang heads' together, but the rules of the National Union clearly lays down who may arbitrate in disputes."(3) As in the Labour

1. West Midlands Conservative Council Rules, pp.11,12.
2. Minutes, The Executive Committee of the West Midlands Area Council, 24.10.70.
3. East Midlands Deputy Central Office Area Agent, letter to author, 13.11.70.

Party, however, formal enquiries are the exception rather than the rule. Informal work helps to ensure that the bulk of local difficulties never reach the official dispute stage. That there are not more public disputes within the two major parties may be something of a tribute to the informal work of the regional and area staff.

D. ADVISORY

Regional organisers and area agents provide advice on organisational and policy matters. Not surprisingly, poorly organised constituencies make most use of their expertise. The need for help is far less pressing in constituencies where there is a full-time agent or where there is a large pool of voluntary help to call upon. Nevertheless, in the Labour Party, it would be incorrect to say that only poorly organised constituency parties contact regional office for advice. On occasions, particularly when there is a dispute in a constituency, regional advice will be sought by the safest constituencies. The range of matters upon which advice is sought is immense, although questions about local government tend to predominate. A series of examples, taken from the East Midlands region indicates the type of enquiries with which regional organisers deal:

On 5th November 1969 the regional organiser had an interview with the chairman of Melton Mowbray Constituency Labour Party. In his report to Head Office the regional organiser wrote:

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On 5th November 1969 the regional organiser had an interview with the chairman of Melton Mowbray Constituency Labour Party. In his report to Head Office the regional organiser wrote:

"The Chairman was concerned about a report which was being presented by a sub-committee the Constituency Party had established to review organisation. He had let me see a copy of the report and I told him that there were a number of suggestions in it which conflicted with the Party Constitution and he could not, therefore, put them into practice. I have since written to the Constituency Party Chairman and am now awaiting the outcome of the meeting where the matter was discussed."(1)

Earlier in the year the regional organiser had visited Holland-with-Boston "To interview the newly appointed election agent for this constituency..... who will be running an election for the first time, and the object of this visit was to discuss all the details involved. I let him have a copy of 'Conduct of Parliamentary Elections' and also gave him details of a conference we shall be organising for constituencies without full-time agents."(2)

In May 1969 the regional organiser visited Mansfield to "meet the Secretary to discuss Local Government Elections in Mansfield and Warwop."(3)

The final example is taken from Derby Borough Labour Party:

"I had an interview with the Secretary/Agent regarding the Party's project to enter the launderette business.

"I had obtained some very useful information on the financing and operation of launderettes via the Nottingham Co-operative Society, and from this it would seem to me that the proposition the Derby Party have in mind will not be viable. I am enclosing a copy of the letter I have received for your information. I am hoping, as a result of this information, the Derby Party will give up the idea."(4)

1. East Midlands Regional Organiser. Report to Head Office. Reference Melton, L 232, Date 5.11.69.
2. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Report to Head Office. Reference, Holland-with-Boston, K 237. Date 1.8.69.
3. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Report to Head Office. Reference, Mansfield, L 543, Date 1.5.69.
4. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Report to Head Office. Reference, Derby, L 50/51, Date 14.10.69.

These examples indicate the range of advice which regional organisers give. In addition, to formal visits, contact with constituency parties is maintained through the telephone. Specialist matters, such as the acquisition of premises for clubs and the utilisation of party property situated in town centres, are rarely dealt with at the regional level, but are usually passed on to local Office to be dealt with by the relevant specialist. Regional advice is largely limited to matters of party organisation at the local level.

The Conservative Party has more full-time agents at the constituency level than the Labour Party. Area offices are, therefore, used relatively rarely for advice, no doubt partly because too much reliance on the area office is felt to reveal incompetence at the constituency level. As in the Labour Party, questions about local government and electoral law provide a large percentage of enquiries.

Regional and area organisers advise committees for the appointment of magistrates and members of Regional Hospital Boards. The North West region of the Labour Party operates differently from the other two regions and from the Conservative Party areas since it is unique in having a Magisterial Sub-Committee which nominates members for consideration. To quote from the North West regional council Annual Report, 1957:

"The Regional Council has pursued its work in this connection during the past year and parties have been circularised accordingly.

"In accordance with usual practice communications were sent to all C.L.P.'s in Lancashire and Cheshire urging the submission of names through the various channels for magisterial appointment. In Lancashire

appointments were satisfactory but in Cheshire appointments were not in accordance with Labour's position in the county. The regional Executive Committee has taken appropriate action and hopes to be able to report improvement in 1957."(1)

In a letter to the author, H.R. Underhill, formerly West Midlands regional organiser, now National Agent of the Labour Party, wrote: "Most organisers are active in their capacity as Regional Council Secretaries in dealing with Registrarial appointments."(2) Conservative Party area agents have similar influence in suggesting names for nomination, but here the process of nomination is even harder to unearth.

All told, this whole area is clouded. The precise influence exerted by regional organisers upon the nominating committees is unclear. That the organisers themselves, however, appear to be relatively happy with the nominating committees' decisions perhaps indicates that their voice is listened to, even if it is only one of many which is considered. Further research is needed to obtain definite information in what has always been a rather uncertain area.

1. SERVICING

Both regional organisers and area agents provide a large number of services to constituency associations, notably, arranging speakers for events throughout the region and organising national, as well as regional, campaigns. In addition, regional and area staff organise and attend policy conferences at the request of Head Office, conduct schools on Party organisation, and lecture at the constituency level. Publicity and Press work is also important.

1. 1957, North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.15.
2. H.R. Underhill, Letter to Author, 23.11.1970.

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In the Labour Party regional office has always provided speakers for meetings. By 1971 it had become recognised as the main channel through which constituency parties obtain speakers. Requests for speakers made directly to the office are referred back to the region by the organisation department at Transport House. The number of constituency parties which rely on their Member of Parliament using informal means to obtain speakers has been on the decline since 1970. The following extract indicates the long-standing nature of this work:

Every effort has been made by the Regional Office to assist Parties to book speakers for public meetings and Party rallies, and whilst a good number of National Speakers have addressed meetings in the Region it has been impossible to satisfy all demands.

"Labour M.P.'s with constituencies in the region have readily undertaken both summer and winter propaganda meetings outside their own divisions and their services are available upon reasonable notice being given to the Regional organiser.

"In so far as it lies within the power of Head Office and the Regional Office the services of well-known speakers will be fairly well catered but Parties must not expect the impossible. Parties could make much wider use of the services of the back-bench Labour M.P.'s for one-day schools, Party Meetings and Public Meetings. The Regional Office is always prepared to suggest the names of other competent people for propaganda meetings and private gatherings of the Party."(1)

Requests for speakers come not only from constituency and local parties, but from a multitude of other organisations, such as trade unions, university societies, trades councils, schools and colleges. Following a reorganisation at Transport House in the late 1960's, greater responsibility over speakers

1. 1949 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, pp.7,8.

was given to regional staff. Front Bench spokesmen were instructed by the Organisation Department not to accept speaking engagements which were not channelled through the Speakers' Department at Transport House. On his appointment in 1969 as National Agent of the Labour Party, Mr. R.G. Hayward issued a directive to the members of his own department stipulating that staff could not accept constituency engagements unless the relevant regional organiser had approved the visit. The informal network of friends through which some constituencies are able to obtain speakers will not, however, be easily thwarted.

In the Conservative Party, area office is the main channel through which constituency parties and other non-political organisations obtain speakers. The extent of this task can be appreciated with reference to the West Midlands Area. In the twelve months ending June 1969 West Midlands Area Office arranged speakers for 436 meetings in the Area, consisting of 47 meetings addressed by Shadow Cabinet Ministers and Front Bench spokesmen, 130 by Back Bench Members of Parliament and 259 meetings addressed by members of the Area Panel.⁽¹⁾ The North West Area, likewise, dealt with 188 meetings for M.P.'s and Front Bench spokesmen in the year ending April 1970,⁽²⁾ besides numerous voluntary speakers on the Area Panel. Table 4.1 illustrates the numbers of speakers booked by area office in the North West and the West Midlands. No figures are available for the East Midlands area.

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1. 1968-69 West Midlands Conservative Council Annual Report, p.5.
 2. 1970 North West Provincial Area Annual Report, p.12.

Table 4.1

Speakers Arranged by the Area Office in the
North West and West Midlands Areas (1965-70)

	West Midlands	North West *
1965-66	395	106
1966-67	390	86
1967-68	369	141
1968-69	436	150
1969-70	-	186

*Voluntary Speakers not included. Voluntary speakers are usually people drawn from the locality, not members of Parliament or other Party notables.

The administrative work involved in obtaining speakers for meetings usually falls on the woman deputy area agent. As in the Labour Party, an "old boy" network exists whereby constituencies may obtain speakers without going via area office. Front Bench speakers are expected, however, to go via the area. An area agent will, albeit infrequently, refuse to sanction a constituency association's request for a Front Bench speaker, either because the occasion is not important enough for the speaker or because the constituency in question has exceeded its fair share of speakers. The demand for speakers is usually far greater than the supply, therefore, area office must try to ensure a fair allocation.

Both regional organisers and area agents are head office employees; as such they administer nationally-organised campaigns. Membership campaigns are frequent in both parties, although they now occur less regularly than in the 1960's. It is usual for membership campaigns to be announced in the months following a General Election. Regional organisers in

the Labour Party are given broad directives to enable flexibility from region to region. Once a membership drive has been announced the regional organiser writes to all constituency parties informing them of the campaign. The constituencies are then visited by a member of the regional staff, in order to explain in detail about the campaign and also to set realistic membership targets. In 1967 the Labour Party ran a membership and development campaign. This meant that the Party's regional organisers had to visit extensively. On 8th January 1969, for example, the West Midlands regional organiser visited the Leominster constituency. In his report to Head Office he observed:

"This Party have accepted a target of 500 members by the end of 1967 and 750 by the end of 1968.

As the Labour vote is so small in this constituency this is a reasonable target although some members feel they may be able to do better. Membership at the moment is just over 300, but the majority of these members are in the Ledbury area.

Plans were made to gradually build up Party membership and there is considerable social activity also under way."(1)

In the North West, constituencies are grouped together for the regional consultations. Writing at the outset of the National Membership campaign in 1952, the East Midlands regional organiser observed:

"We have decided that the energies of the Regional Office could best be used if they were directed towards:

1. The marginal constituencies.
2. The Parties whose membership stood below 1,000 on 31st December 1951.

"We aim to visit all these Parties and discuss with them their organisation. We shall review the

1. Reference M 138, Date 8.1.1967.

the collecting machinery, the efficiency or otherwise of existing parties, the villages in the county constituencies where parties ought to be formed, particularly where we have contacts, and which parties are able to give help in other parts of the constituency.

"Having got all this information we shall then discuss the plans for the campaign. These plans are obviously based on the conditions found as a result of the investigation.

"The plans in the main are devised to build up the weak parties and set up new ones. Even in the boroughs we are trying to get our people to concentrate on the weak wards. Many constituencies are running autumn campaigns built round their M.P. or prospective Parliamentary Candidate, all of whom are readily responding to the requests of their constituency parties.

"We do not always get our suggestions carried out. We would think something was wrong if every party agreed with our ideas. But the individual approach is showing results."(1)

Like their Labour counterparts, Conservative area agents are involved in work resulting from national directives. Membership campaigns and the annual contracting-out campaign, are the main aspects of this work. As the field agents of Central Office they direct these national campaigns in their own area, working within a broad framework of action set down by Head Office. In 1958, for example, a National Membership drive was initiated. The following quotation, taken from the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the North West Provincial Area indicates what this involves at the area level:

"Recruiting Campaign.

"The Honorary Secretary gave a comprehensive report on the National Membership Campaign which is to take place in the Autumn from 1st September to 16th December.

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1. Labour Organiser, September 1952. Volume 31, Number 365, p.178.

"It was agreed that a series of four group conferences should be held in the summer during the end of June or beginning of July, in order that members of the Membership Campaign Committee could attend and speak about the arrangements." (1)

Every autumn the Conservative Party organises a national "contracting out" campaign, in which each constituency association is encouraged to take part. This is directed by area office on instructions from Head Office. The campaign is aimed at persuading Conservative trade unionists to opt out of paying their political levy. Each autumn the area agent writes to constituency associations, enclosing sample literature and providing details of the campaign. Constituencies which fail to respond are reminded by area office of their responsibilities although, in the final analysis, the area agent has no power to dictate to constituency associations.

Other national campaigns are initiated from time to time. Again, these necessitate administrative oversight by the area office. At the 1965 Party Conference the "Ten Willing Unit" Campaign was launched with the aim of boosting party finance: "In the West Midlands Area, three briefing meetings were held prior to the campaign for constituency officers and agents. These were held at Birmingham, Droitwich and Wolverhampton. Nearly every Constituency in the Area participated in the Campaign, meeting with varying success. Some constituencies did very well." (2) Likewise, the National Fund-Raising Campaign 1967/68 involved area agents. The North West Provincial Area Annual Report for 1968 stated:

1. Minutes of the North West Provincial Council Finance and General Purposes Committee, 25th April 1958.
2. 1965/66 West Midlands Conservative Council Annual Report, p.7.

"A special National Fund-Raising Campaign Committee has been set up in the Area, and, as a result, detailed plans for the campaign have been drawn up. All sections of the Party - both at constituency and Area level - will have to pull together in order to achieve our substantial Area target."(1)

Both parties, particularly when in government, arrange policy conferences "so that the policies of the Government can be discussed with Party members."(2) In the Labour party, for example, a recent series of conferences was entitled "The Policies of the Labour Government." Between January and November 1967 the North West Regional Office organised 13 conferences.(3) In the year June 1967/68 there were 19 policy conferences in the West Midlands Region,(4) while in the East Midlands Region 14 conferences were organised.(5) The speakers for these conferences are provided by Head Office; regional office is responsible for booking halls, printing tickets, sending out credentials to delegates, arranging meals and accommodation. The initiatives for these conferences come from Transport House; the regional organiser must give effect to these initiatives locally.

In the Conservative Party policy conferences are far less frequent. The debates within the party over nuclear disarmament in the 1950's, and the Industrial Relations Bill, 1971, were two examples of topics which were made the subject of policy conferences. To quote from the minutes of the North

1. 1968 North west Provincial Area Annual Report, p.8.
2. 1968 West Midlands Regional Council, Annual Report, p.4.
3. 1968 North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.7.
4. 1968 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.4.
5. 1968 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.5.

West Provincial Area Finance and General Purposes Committee,
25th April 1958:

"Nuclear Disarmament Meetings.

"The Hon. Sec. reported that mass meetings were held in various parts of the country including Manchester, in connection with Nuclear Disarmament, and that the Chairman of the Party considered that every effort should be made to put forward our own point of view and to oppose the Pacifist ideas which were being promulgated."(1)

The Industrial Relations Bill, 1971, produced considerable controversy, both within the country and inside the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party leadership therefore organised a series of conferences early in 1971 at which members were briefed on party policy. Once again all the administrative details were left to the area agents. The literature sent out by area office to party leaders in the North West in December 1971 stated: "Leaders of the Conservative Party, at all levels of our organisation, need to be fully briefed on this important Bill."(2) Three conferences were held in the North West Area during January 1971 on the Industrial Relations Bill.

Both regional organisers and area agents organise day and weekend conferences on their own initiative. These usually concentrate on the duties of party officers, election organisation, and similar matters. In the twelve months from May 1968 to May 1969 there were four weekend schools sponsored by the West Midlands Labour Party; three Youth Schools were also held. In the twelve months March 1969 to March 1970 there were two main schools (including a one week conference).

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1. North West Provincial Area, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 25th April 1958.
 2. North Western Area Office, Party documents, 1971.

two Youth Schools and four Women's Schools in the North West region. In addition, in 1969 all agents or potential agents for the forthcoming General Election were invited to attend one of three weekend residential conferences dealing with election preparations. There was also a conference for agents and city party secretaries in October 1969. In all, there were twelve residential conferences during the twelve month period. In the East Midlands Region there were four weekend conferences in the period from April 1969 to April 1970, one of these being a Young Socialists Conference.(1)

Numerous day conferences are organised by regional offices, particularly in the period immediately prior to local government elections, at which questions of policy and organisation are dealt with by regional staff and guest speakers. In the East Midlands region between April 1969 and March 1970 there were 41 conferences (including the four weekend schools). Regional organisers not only organise these conferences; they frequently have to lecture as well.

In the Conservative Party each area agent arranges his own conferences on organisation. The West Midlands Area, for example, has a series of "Organisation Suppers" every February to discuss forthcoming local government elections. In February 1965, for instance, a series of such suppers was held "at Droitwich, Stoke-on-Trent, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Leamington Spa and Gloucester. Representatives from Constituency Associations were present to hear an address by Mr. J. Galloway, O.B.E.. (The Area Agent) and to take part in

1. Information from the Annual Reports of the North West, West Midlands and East Midlands Regional Councils, 1968-1970.

discussions which were led by the Area Chairman, Mr. G.W. Angles, D.B.E."(1) There are, however, policy conferences in the Conservative Party.

Regional and area offices provide a service to constituency associations on press and publicity matters. It is, of course, at election times that the service is most widely used. Following the report of the Committee of Enquiry into Party Organisation, 1968, Labour Party assistant regional organisers were given a crash course in public relations in February 1969. The 1969 Labour Party Annual Conference Report stated:

"Twenty-five tutors, some professional lecturers, other highly skilled professional people in the world of communication dealt with 26 subjects and all aspects of public relations were covered."(2)

This short course was an attempt to train regional staff in the basic principles of press and publicity work. In practice, however, there are relatively few calls upon regional office to provide such a service outside election times. Although the local newspapers are quick to telephone regional office if a local story is referred to in the national press, and although regional organisers circulate the press when front bench speakers visit the region, it is a mistake to exaggerate the importance of regional office in press matters. The national party machine plays the dominant role.

Television and radio networks often work through regional office in their dealings with constituencies. Regional organisers are occasionally asked to select a speaker on a particular topic. The advent of local radio has meant an increased

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1. 1966 West Midlands Conservative Council Annual Report, p.8.
 2. 1969 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.34.

volume of work, but it is still by no means heavy. Outside General Elections, regional office has a relatively minor press and publicity role.

Until 1968 each Conservative area had a full-time press officer. A streamlining of staff, however, resulted in the sacking of the Press Officers, along with the C.P.C. and Trade Union organisers. At the 1968 Party Conference, Mr. Anthony Barber, the Party Chairman, remarked that "..... Relations with the press, radio and television..... are of such importance that I decided that they should be the responsibility of the Area Agent himself." (1) In practice, however, in all but the North West Area, a deputy area agent has dealt with the press work. In the North West, the area agent acted as Press Officer himself until early 1971 when he delegated to one of the deputy area agents. By 1971, a deputy area agent was Press Officer in each of the three areas being considered. The 1969 Annual Report of the North West Provincial Area observed:

"The activities of the Area Press and Publicity Department at the Area Office have been continued in spite of the fact that we are now without an Area Press and Publicity Officer.

"The department maintains a regular supply of handouts and news items to the press, radio and television authorities in the Area, and these have continued to receive much news coverage." (2)

Conservative Party activists are encouraged to write letters to the Press and area office co-ordinates this work. To quote the 1967 East Midlands Annual Report: "while there has been a greater interest in writing political letters to

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1. 1968 Conservative Party Annual Conference Report, p.24.
 2. 1969 North West Provincial Area Annual Report, p.12.

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the local Press, there is room for an improvement and help in this valuable way of getting over Conservative principles is always available from the Press Officer."(1) In the North West the "letters to the press" service is very highly organised:

"The Area letter-writers' panel has supplied contributors with a regular flow of material for readers' letters and this has resulted in an increased number of column inches being secured in the readers' letter column. Considerable importance is attached to this aspect of the work and new members of the panel are constantly being sought."(2)

Each area operates a radio and television monitors' panel. Through this network area office receives reports on Party Political Broadcasts and also notes instances of unwarranted political bias in other programmes. Regular reports are sent by area office to the Broadcasting Department at Central office where the material is analysed.

At the area level in the Conservative Party press and publicity work assumes greater significance than at the regional level in the Labour Party. Given the healthier state of Conservative organisation at the constituency level, area agents are in a better position to concentrate on broader matters such as press and publicity. The Labour Party's regional organisers are not in a position to do this, given the state of organisation at the constituency level.

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1. 1966/67 East Midlands Area Annual Report, p.11.
 2. 1970 North West Provincial Area Annual Report, p.11.

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IV-VI

Regional organisers and area agents are involved in a task of work at the constituency level. It is important, however, to determine the division of work at the regional/area level and establish the amount of time allocated to each function. An analysis of staff visits in the East Midlands region during 1967 provides some indication of the distribution of work at the regional level in the Labour Party:

TABLE 4.2

THE EAST MIDLANDS REGION: DIVISION OF WORK, 1967.

<u>Mr. J. Cattermole</u> (Regional Organiser)	<u>Number of</u> <u>Visits</u>
Parliamentary Candidates	15
Agency Appointments	11
Parliamentary By-Elections	46
Enquiries	6
General	197
Schools	4
County Committees	5
Regional Council	10
Miscellaneous	<u>23</u>
	<u>323</u>

Mrs. M. Long (Assistant)

Regional Council	3
Parliamentary By-Elections	86
Parliamentary Selections	1
C.L.P's, D.L.P's and Wards	80
Regional Council Education Conferences	20
Staff, Womens and National Conferences	17
Local Government Elections	25
W.S. Meetings and Functions	29
Federation and Central Committees	24
Women's Advisory Councils	32
Regional Women's Events	6
Supper Clubs	3
Miscellaneous	<u>12</u>
	<u>338</u>

Mr. R.W. Simmons (Assistant)

Parliamentary Candidates	1	
Parliamentary By-Elections	118	
Enquiry	1	
General	85	
County Committees	3	
Regional Council	2	
Miscellaneous	8	
Young Socialists	46	
	<u>264</u>	(1)

The assistant regional organisers spend a high proportion of their time at Parliamentary by-elections. In addition, much work is devoted to their special areas of activity. The assistant organiser responsible for youth made 46 visits in connection with youth activities, and the assistant organiser responsible for women made 94 visits to Women's Sections during 1967. The assistants organise activities for their respective sections.

The distribution of work within a Conservative Party area office can be illustrated with reference to the West Midlands area in 1968:

TABLE 4.3

THE WEST MIDLANDS AREA: DIVISION OF WORK, 1968

Mr. Galloway (Area Agent)

Members of Parliament
Candidates
Agents
Finance
Critical Seats
Publicity and Press Policy

Mrs. Wyatt (Deputy)

Women
Speakers
Universities
National Speaking Competition

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1. West Midlands Regional Office. Evidence Presented to the Simpson Committee on Party Organisation, 1968.

Mr. Stringer (Deputy)

Local Government
Area Council matters
Internal Office Administration
Area Office Staff
Trainees
Conservative Clubs Liaison

Mr. Peel (Deputy)

C.P.C.
Industrial Department (T.U.'s)
Education Department (Teachers)
Publicity and Press Executive Duties

Mr. Simpson (Young Conservative Organiser)

Young Conservatives."(1)

In an accompanying note to constituency party agents

Mr. J. Galloway, the area agent wrote:

"Liaison with Constituency Associations and sections thereof, and attendance at Constituency Associations and Sectional Meetings, is the responsibility of every member of staff.

"I, as Central Office Agent, have ultimate responsibility for all Departments and Deputy Central Office Agents and the Young Conservative Organiser work under my general direction. Although the various departments have been allocated as shown above, the staff do not work in water-tight compartments and as and where and when necessary, everybody is ready and willing to weigh in to work in any department."(2)

Summary

Within the Conservative Party there is a degree of functional specialisation at the area level which is largely absent in the Labour Party. In their work, Labour Party regional organisers are essentially generalists, unable, because of the gaps in constituency and local party organisation to specialise to any great degree. The only exceptions are

1. Document circulated by West Midlands Area Office, 1st August 1968.
2. Document circulated by the West Midlands Area Agent, 1st August 1968.

the assistant regional organisers who each concentrate on either women's or youth work. The greater professionalism of the Conservative Party's local organisation has enabled greater effort to be devoted to broader organisational matters. Quite how useful this work is must be questioned. Given the poor state of Labour Party constituency organisation, regional organisers are utilised to the full in dealing with problems as they arise. The healthy state of much of the Conservative Party's constituency organisation has meant less work for area agents at the grass-roots level. Indeed, in areas with a high proportion of full-time constituency agents (like the West Midlands), the value of maintaining one area agent, three deputies, a Young Conservative organiser and several secretaries must be open to question.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONSTITUENCY/REGIONAL RELATIONSHIP: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Both regional organisers and area agents are employed by their national party organisations, yet spend much of their time working at the constituency level. This chapter discusses some of the most important factors determining the extent of regional and area intervention at the constituency level, namely, the authority/influence of regional and area staff, the professionalism of constituency party organisation, and the financial position of constituency parties. It also examines the extent to which involvement by regional and area organisers poses a threat to constituency autonomy. Inevitably there will be some overlap with previous chapters, but this will be kept to a minimum. The relationship between city parties and regional/area staff is sufficiently distinct to merit separate examination and is dealt with in Chapter six.

1. Authority/Influence

In both the Labour and Conservative Parties the precise relationship between constituency parties and regional officials is rather uncertain. The confusion in the Labour Party was evident in 1926 when the July edition of The Labour Organiser carried an article under the heading "Answers to Correspondents":

"Question:- I should be obliged if you would let me know the relationship between Labour Parties and Regional Organisers. What duties are required of these comrades and what rights have they with respect to Labour Party Organisations within their areas?

"Answer:- Some friends have a penchant for asking awkward questions and this is one. In our postal reply to this question we stated that the powers of regional officers are merely those reflected from the Head Office. Such powers as are possessed by the Party are exercised in some part through its regional officers, who also exercise a well-understood and accepted initiative in unorganised or partly organised areas, and of co-ordination between local parties in the interests of national and regional organisation. We added that it was impossible to define in terms everything implied in that answer, and that usually good sense, tact and mutual interest solved any fine points about financial limits, and we said that these faculties have to be exercised all round to get the best results.

"Our correspondent pressed us for something more definite and we replied that the functions and duties of regional officers were nowhere precisely laid down; nor for that matter were the functions of the National Executive Committee to whom they were responsible.

"As the inquiry came from a constituency where an agent was employed, we added that usually the fact that an agent was employed, meant less for the Head Office officials to do. But on the other hand the fact of an agent's employment did not itself diminish any rights or functions the Head Office possessed. Rather in one sense it added to the responsibilities, for the work of supervision was just one of the functions that was fairly clear, and was implied in the grant made."(1)

All Conservative Party literature on organisation emphasises the importance of constituency autonomy. The Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (The Maxwell-Pyfe Report) stated:

"The basis of the Conservative Party is the constituency association. Every association is an autonomous body. It appoints its own officers, adopts its own candidate, selects its own agent and runs its own organisation in its own way.....

1. The Labour Organiser. No.65, July 1926, p.10.

In order to facilitate regular contact with constituencies and to ensure that their requirements are promptly and sympathetically dealt with, the Central Office has a branch in each of the twelve areas of England and Wales under an official known as the Central Office agent. It should be understood that, although the Central Office keeps in close touch with the areas through the area offices, no orders can be given to the constituency associations either by the Central Office or by the area offices. The co-operation of constituencies is generally assured through personal relationships between the Association officers and the Central Office Agent."(1)

Neither Central Office nor the area agent is invested with authority at the constituency level. Area agents may advise and suggest, but they are not in a position to dictate a particular course of action to a constituency association. Area office has a servicing function for constituencies which was emphasised as early as 1907 by J.G. Shaw, the first Secretary of the Midland Union of Conservative Associations. In a circular dated May 1907, Shaw wrote:

"It should, at the outset, be clearly understood that the Midland Union does not in any way attempt to interfere with, or take part in, the work of the party in any constituency, unless it receives a specific request to do so. The Midland Union is intended to be, and is, a conservative body, and should be regarded as a parent association, to which the leading Conservatives in the Midlands may, at all times, turn for advice and assistance".(2)

The emphasis on advice and assistance was taken up by the Maxwell-Fyfe Committee: "The role of the Central Office is to guide, inspire and co-ordinate the work of the party throughout the country, to advise and assist constituency associations and area councils and to provide such services

1. The Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (The Maxwell-Fyfe Report), The National Union, London, 1949, pp.6,8.
2. From the archives of the Midland Union of Conservative Associations (held at the offices of the West Midlands Conservative Council).

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as can best be organised centrally".(1) The Conservative Party's organisational handbook also stresses the provision of services for constituency associations: "It is the duty of these (area) officials to transact Central Office business in the area, and to act as a channel of communication between the Central Office, the area and the constituencies. They are available to help and advise the various party organisations in the area, and should be invited to attend in an advisory capacity meetings of associations and executives".(2)

This emphasis on the provision of advice and services is fundamental to the constituency/area relationship. As in the Labour Party, it is incorrect to talk in terms of "authority". Area agents have little authority at the constituency level although, like Labour Party regional organisers, they may have "influence", particularly where the local unit is organisationally weak. The West Midlands Conservative area agent summarised the position as follows: "The area agent has no authority except in his own office. The constituencies are not subject to his authority in the strictest sense of the word. Such authority as he has is moral authority. He is in no position to instruct anybody. He cannot give an order to any constituency agent".(3) The North Western area agent also recognised that he had "very little formal powers. The relationship is almost entirely one of contact and influence. They (the constituency associations) make the contacts and you can use the influence."(4)

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1. Maxwell-Pyfe, op.cit., p.9.
 2. The Party Organisation, The National Union, London, August 1964. p.22.
 3. J.C. Galloway, interview, 19.11.69
 4. A.E. Garner, interview, 25.11.69.

This lack of authority over constituency associations characterises all levels of the Central Office hierarchy.

In his memoirs Lord Woolton wrote:

"I faced up to the fact that whilst as Chairman of the Party I had received an enthusiastic welcome from the associations, I had, on paper, no control over their activities: they selected their candidates; they selected their agent and employed him; they arranged their meetings, and were at liberty to make direct approach to any speakers they desired. I depended on their good will, which obviously they were anxious to give, in the creation of a headquarters staff which would be so efficient in performance and so approachable in manner that their influence would overcome their lack of authority."(1)

Constituency party autonomy is more than an abstract concept. In 1963 the Stratford-on-Avon constituency agent refused to allow any Central Office representative to assist in the Parliamentary by-election. Mr. J.G. Galloway, the area agent, was absent at the time so Central Office sent a replacement from London who, on his arrival, was promptly told to leave the constituency. Again, in 1969, the Smethwick constituency selected its prospective Parliamentary candidate without inviting the area agent to attend the selection conference. In the Labour Party such a selection would have been invalid, but in the Conservative Party it is not necessary for a representative of Head Office to be present at selection conferences.

There are important differences between the two parties in their constituency/regional relationships. As the representatives of the N.E.C., Labour Party regional organisers have certain powers which are denied to Conservative area agents. Regional organisers are given authority to intervene

1. The Memoirs of the Rt.Hon. The Earl of Woolton.
London, 1959, p.333.

at the constituency level in a way which is foreign to area agents. The N.E.C. must always be represented at selection meetings for prospective Parliamentary candidates. In effect, this means that the regional organiser, or one of his assistants, must be present at a selection meeting, otherwise it would be declared invalid by the N.E.C. Regional organisers have similar powers over agency selection. No party can proceed to advertise for a constituency agent without the approval of the N.E.C. This means, in practice, that the regional organiser must convince the N.E.C. that the constituency is financially viable. The short list has to be approved and the regional organiser attends all agency selection conferences, whether or not the constituency is in receipt of aid from the N.E.C.

In the Conservative Party, prospective Parliamentary candidate selection conferences are usually attended by area officials, but selections are perfectly valid whether or not an area agent is present. One could conclude from this that constituency autonomy is stronger in the Conservative Party than it is in the Labour Party. But so is the idea of loyalty to the centre; in the Conservative Party there is a deep-rooted desire not to conflict with the leadership. In the Labour Party, on the other hand, there is no such traditional notion of deference to the leadership. Indeed, constituency parties are often openly hostile. The two parties have, therefore, found it necessary to adopt different organisational techniques. The political loyalty of most Conservative constituency associations does not necessitate area agents possessing formal powers to secure party ends. Constituency associations

appear to be concerned most of all, with supporting the party leadership. The prevailing atmosphere in the Labour Party, however, demands that the leadership have some authority at the constituency level in matters such as candidate and agency selection. The different roles of area agents and regional organisers at the constituency level have their origins in the different political habits of the two parties.

The establishment, in 1969, of the Labour Party's National Agency Scheme endowed regional organisers with some authority in constituencies employing an agent from this service. Regional organisers can issue detailed instructions to agents employed in this scheme, since these agents are salaried largely by the National Executive Committee. Each regional organiser has to submit a quarterly report to Transport House, detailing the work carried out by the National Agency Scheme employees. Agents who refuse to obey regional directives risk being dismissed.

Regional organisers thus have formal authority at the constituency level in three main areas: the selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates; the selection of constituency agents, and the supervision of constituency agents employed in the National Agency Scheme. However, formal authority is limited. No regional organiser stands to achieve a good working relationship with constituency parties solely by relying on his formal authority as a representative of the National Executive Committee. Respect for an organiser is a key factor in determining constituency/regional relationships. At the same time, however, respect is difficult to

evaluate. Regional organisers, not unnaturally, tend to exaggerate the importance of this factor in accounting for the relationship between themselves and the constituencies. H.R. Underhill, National Agent of the Labour Party, formerly West Midlands Regional Organiser, has expressed a balanced viewpoint: "The regional organiser does not have to be loved by everyone, but he needs to be respected, and the agents must not hesitate before they call on him in any matter".(1)

2. Constituency Organisation

The services provided by regional office are regularly sought by many constituency Labour Parties. The chronic shortage of agents in the Labour Party (only 141 in 618 constituencies in 1970) has led to the drawing in of regional staff to deal with what are often routine tasks at the constituency level. The position in the Labour Party contrasts with that in the Conservative Party (386 agents in 618 constituencies in 1970). In the Conservative Party, only the relatively few poorly organised constituencies depend on the advice and services of area office.

In the Conservative Party most "safe" constituencies employ a full-time agent. Such agents usually have little need to call on area office. For example, Miss J. Godfrey, the constituency agent in Warwick and Leamington, maintained that she had telephoned the area agent only a dozen times between 1966 and 1970, except during the 1968 by-election when area office services were utilised more fully. The

1. H.R. Underhill, interview, 21.1.70.

The constituency agent asserted "we do use them (the area office) for speakers" and she maintained that area office was "useful for openers for Women's Branch bazaars".(1)

The implication of this kind of remark is that, for safe seats, area office is not particularly important and its services are rarely utilised. This point was emphasised by the Conservative Party's Director of Organisation who saw "no reason why a really good constituency should trouble the area". Recalling his period as area agent in the North West, the Director observed that he "had an understanding with the good constituencies to only visit once a year, although he would obviously visit should problems arise".(2)

The current North West area agent, likewise, asserted: "As regards constituencies you do get more contact with some than others. It largely depends upon the degree of organisation at the local level. Where there is a good agent and good organisation the contact can be quite small. In tough seats with very few workers and organisation there is a need which area office can fill".(3)

In 1964 Ian Trethowan summarised the position of area office as follows:

"The rather ambivalent role of these area offices reflects the position of the Central Office itself: they have no power at all over the constituency associations, who can completely ignore them, and quite often do, although for varying reasons. Other associations are on perfectly good terms with the area office, but find little reason to consult it. A well run association, with a good, experienced agent, lively officers, and a big enough income to support itself, is almost completely self-sufficient, unless it runs into some really

1. Miss J. Godfrey, interview, 21.5.70.
2. R. Webster, interview, 11.3.70.
3. A.S. Garner, interview, 25.11.69.

major problem, in which case as often as not, the agent will by-pass the area office and get straight through to Smith Square.

"The area office comes into its own where there is a weak constituency association, probably in some Labour stronghold. The stronger associations subscribe to a fund, administered by Central Office, out of which the weaker ones can be subsidised. Although nominally Central Office still has no control over the associations, the man who pays the piper is at least well placed to 'advise' the tune".(1)

3. Finance

The third factor requiring examination is the financial relationship between constituency parties and regional area units. In this context two questions must be considered: How much money is given by the centre (via area and regional offices) to help finance constituency parties? Do the parties in receipt of aid come more readily under the influence of the centre?

In the Labour Party most of the money which is spent locally is raised locally. During the years 1967-1969, constituency parties contributed more to the National Executive Committee in the form of affiliation fees than they received from the centre in the form of grants. In 1969, for example, constituency Labour parties received £23,659, while they contributed £33,729 to N.E.C. funds.(2) However, those constituencies which employ an agent from the National Agency Scheme may be subject to some control by regional organisers, since part of the agents' salaries are paid by the centre. Agents employed in this scheme (there were 40 in 1970) are

1. Ian Trethowan, "The Tory Strategists", New Society 21st May 1964, pp.13-15.
2. Information from 1969 Labour Party Annual Conference Report.

liable to regional office supervision, as outlined in chapter three.

In the Conservative Party, as M. Pinto-Duschinsky has demonstrated, (1) national and constituency party finances are almost entirely independent:

"The bulk of monies raised by Central Office are spent centrally and monies collected locally are spent locally. Second, insofar as there is any transfer of funds between Central Office and constituency associations, the sums coming to the centre (mostly from associations in safe constituencies) are much larger than the grants from the centre to the constituencies (the large majority of these go to associations in hopeless seats). Central Office thus depends on the constituencies... The financial self-sufficiency of the local associations together with the personal independence of the party workers greatly reduces the ability of Central Office to impose its will." (2)

Pinto-Duschinsky summarised the position in the Conservative Party as follows:

TABLE 5.1

Who pays the piper? Estimated central and local finances, April 1966 - June 1970 (England and Wales) (3)

CENTRAL OFFICE	Income	Expenditure	
Raised by Central Office	£4 million	£5 million ^a	Spent centrally
Quota donations from constituencies	£1½ million ^c	£150,000 ^b	Grants to constituencies
TOTAL INCOME (approx.)	£5½ million	£5 million	TOTAL EXPENDITURE (approx.)
CONSTITUENCY ASSOCIATIONS			
Grants from Central Office	£150,000 ^b	£1½ million	'Quota' donations to Central Office
Raised locally	9½ million ^d	£8½ million	Spent locally
TOTAL INCOME (approx.)	£10 million	£10 million	TOTAL EXPENDITURE (approx.)

1. M. Pinto-Duschinsky, "Central Office and 'Power' in the Conservative Party", Political Studies, Vo. XX, March 1972, Number 1, pp.1-16.
2. *Ibid.*, pp.7,9.
3. *Ibid.*, p.8.

SOURCES

- (a) These totals have been derived in the same way as those in Table 1. (See page 3 of the article.)
- (b) 'Grants to constituencies' include (i) marginal weighting allowances to agents, (ii) direct payments to constituencies (these form about half the amounts listed in the published accounts as 'Direct assistance to constituencies') (iii) grants towards election expenses.
- (c) The total is derived from published quota payments, 1967-70, estimated payments 1966-7 and April-June 1970. Fifteen per cent has been subtracted to cover 'quota credits'.
- (d) These estimates are based on an examination of nearly 500 accounts of constituency and city associations.

Using the same figures, however, one could argue exactly the opposite to Pinto-Duschinsky, namely, that instead of showing the strength of constituency associations, the figures indicate the strength of Central Office, which is able to appropriate more money from constituencies than it is obliged to pay back. The figures can, therefore, be interpreted in two ways. In any event, finance is an awkward variable to analyse. The statistics provided by Pinto-Duschinsky are, of course, overall figures. To prove that constituencies in receipt of aid from the centre are more easily controlled or influenced by the area agent than those without financial help would necessitate detailed research on a single constituency basis. Constituencies in receipt of aid would need to be compared with those not in receipt of aid. Even then, the discovery of greater centralisation in aided constituencies is no guarantee that finance is the key variable determining the role of the area agent in these constituencies. There is no available research to substantiate the hypothesis that the degree of intervention by area office in a constituency is in direct proportion to the financial subsidies made by Central

office. When a financial grant is provided to a constituency association, however, an area agent has an influential voice in determining its size. This task, however, has declined in importance since the number of constituencies in receipt of Central Office aid has decreased markedly. In the North Western area (the only area which made the information available in its annual reports) the balance sheets emphasised, not only that relatively little money was paid through area office to constituency associations, but that the total amounts have declined significantly between 1964 and 1970. Contributions to constituency agents' salaries declined from £8,998 to £1,725, to clerks' salaries from £1,207 to £12. (See Table 5.2.)

TABLE 5.2

The Conservative Party
The North Western Area

Financial grants paid through area office to constituency associations in the area 1964-1970.(1)

Year	Contributions towards constituency agents' salaries			Contributions towards constituency clerks' salaries		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1964	8998	9	5	1207	4	0
1965	5450	13	11	1207	4	0
1966	3888	11	7	731	13	4
1967	1548	12	11	66	1	6
19 months ended 31.3.68	2055	6	0	47	6	6
Year ended 31.3.70	1725	0	0	12	1	6

Detailed figures from the North West and the West Midlands areas indicate both the size of grants made to constituency associations and also the type of constituencies in receipt of this aid, which was usually given specifically for the purpose of strengthening local organisation.

1. Information obtained from North West Provincial Area Annual Reports, 1965-1971.

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TABLE 5.3

The Conservative Party
The North Western Area

Area grants paid to constituency associations, July-September 1958.(1)

	£	s.	d.
Accrington	37	10	0
Bolton	16	13	4
Rochdale	8	6	8
Heywood and Royton	28	18	4
Bootle	27	1	8
TOTAL	118	10	0

Again, between September 15th and October 15th 1967, the following grants were paid to constituencies:

TABLE 5.4

The Conservative Party
The North Western Area

Area grants paid to constituency associations, September 15th - October 15th, 1967.(2)

	£	s.	d.
Parnworth	25	0	0
Leigh	25	0	0
Heywood and Royton	16	13	4
Widnes	33	6	8
Preston	66	13	4
Oldham West	23	8	3
TOTAL	240	2	1

In the year February 1955 to February 1956 the following grants were given in the West Midlands Area:

1. Information obtained from North West Provincial Area, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, 1958.
2. Ibid., 1967.

TABLE 5.5

The Conservative Party
The West Midlands Area

Area grants paid to constituency associations, February
1955 - February 1956.(1)

Stoke Central	£50	Local Government Election Expenses
Meriden	£500)	
Walsall North	£500)	Special Remuneration Grants
Dudley and Stourbridge	£55	
West Gloucestershire	£100	
Newcastle-under-Lyme	£150	Missioners
South Gloucestershire	£100	
Walsall South	£75 and £50	
Rowley Regis and Tipton	£150	
Stoke South	£100	
Gloucester	£300	

The sums given to individual constituencies are not large. In themselves they are unlikely to be sufficient to enable an area agent to "control" a constituency association. The weak financial state of most constituencies in receipt of aid makes them more dependent upon area office than safe Conservative constituencies, but financial aid in itself is not necessarily the sole criterion for "control" or even "influence" at the constituency level. It is only one of several factors which helps to shape the constituency/regional relationship.

There are some useful analogies to be drawn with local government in the nineteenth century. Despite the formal autonomy which constituency parties enjoy, poorly organised and financially weak units are dependent to a greater or lesser extent upon the centre for the provision of services. The same was true with many local government authorities in the second half of the nineteenth century.

1. Information obtained from West Midlands Conservative Council, Finance and General Purposes Committee Reports, 1955-56.

In an article entitled "Central and local relations in mid-Victorian England"(1) R. Lambert asked why, in spite of the doctrines of decentralisation which were prevalent in 1858, local authorities should have accepted, and even requested, aid from the central authorities. The Local Government Act of 1858 had two main objects:

"In the key words of G.B. Adderley, the Conservative Minister who introduced it, these were, first, 'to decentralise the whole system' of health administration by relieving local authorities of 'the necessity of referring to the central board in London' and, secondly, to give the authorities 'the ample powers of self-determination'".(2)

Lambert observed that the level of central interference was partly concerned with the type of place concerned: "though the office had close contact with some great city corporations, with most of them its relations were ephemeral ... the large cities preferred to work alone, through expensive Local Acts and their own professional staffs. But the smaller towns and villages which came within the office's province though the Local Government, Sewage, and Sanitary Acts had neither inhibiting dignity, technical resources, nor special problems to prevent reliance on the centre".(3) Another point relevant to poorly organised constituencies in both parties was discussed by Lambert:

"After all, central direction was not only expert. It was free. For some smaller authorities which could or would not afford a technical staff, gratuitous expertise had an irresistible attraction... Gratuitous expertise did more than create a demand for central action; it helped to make that action tolerable where undesired. It sugared the

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1. R. Lambert "Central and local relations in mid-Victorian England", Victorian Studies, December, 1962.
 2. Ibid., p.122.
 3. Ibid., p.150.

the coercive pill. If localities were being forced to act, at least their requirements were being assessed by an engineer the like of which they might not be able to employ for themselves; both 'cheap and expert'. Even in the superseded localities these motives might help to overcome hostility to the centre.... By a supreme irony, in view of the hopes of 1858, it was the localities which found that the ministrations of the central authority could not be dispensed with, and it was the localities which had to induce the centre continually to extend its responsibilities".(1)

Poor constituency associations, unable to afford full-time organising staff of their own, resemble the smaller local authorities in the nineteenth century.

Such nineteenth century local authorities were reliant on aid from central government, aid which was free. Today, weak constituency associations are reliant on the "gratuitous expertise" provided by regional and area offices.

Summary

Regional organisers and area agents lack formal authority at the constituency level. In both parties, however, weak constituencies are heavily dependent upon the services which are provided through regional offices. The services of Labour Party regional organisers are utilised more fully by constituency parties than are those of Conservative area agents. This is essentially because the Labour Party's constituency organisation is relatively unprofessional and therefore a greater amount of regional assistance is required. Area and regional officers serve the constituency party units, providing advice and assistance when requested. Regional organisers and area agents must persuade parties to heed their advice. They are in no position to command any constituencies to obey their directives.

1. Ibid., pp.147,150.

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1. Ibid., pp.147,150.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CITY/REGIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

City parties are sufficiently distinct from constituency parties to merit separate examination. Internally they are often exceptionally centralised and make little use of voluntary help. While the city parties argue that their centralised structure has enabled them to maintain a professional service in areas where it would otherwise be very difficult to provide a permanent organisation, regional and area organisers frequently assert that all too often centralisation has produced organisational inefficiency and inactivity. Repeated requests by regional and area staff for a change in emphasis at the city party level have tended to antagonise city personnel. Accusations of financial and organisational inefficiency, coupled with tensions between city chief agents and regional/area staff, have often produced deeply-rooted and lasting conflicts between these two organisational levels. Nevertheless, the city/regional tensions reflect more than simple personality differences. They have their origins in the rather uncertain constitutional positions of the city and regional, or area, offices.

In his report following an enquiry into party organisation (1963), Selwyn Lloyd asserted that in the Conservative Party:

"The relationship between large cities and the areas within which they are situated frequently has not been a very happy one. The city organisation has tended to regard itself as something apart and able to dispense with the help which area headquarters

can give. There has been the feeling that the city organisation is the independent 'empire' of the local Conservative leader or party and so unwilling to co-operate... From every point of view it is desirable that the larger cities should be brought into closer co-operation with the Area and National Executive."(1)

Like constituency associations, Conservative Party city associations are formally independent of Central Office. Most large city associations have set their faces against national attempts to secure influence at this level. Clashes between chief agents, employed by the city associations, and area agents, employed by Central Office, appear to have been most intense in Birmingham and Manchester. Besides the on-going dispute over organisational inefficiency at the city level, there have been arguments over finance. Most constituency associations now allow the party's Central Board of Finance to collect local business contributions, but many city associations have continued to claim these large contributions for themselves and have, where possible, kept the area collectors out of the cities. As a result, Central Office raises relatively little money from the large cities. The efforts of area agents to open up the cities to central collectors have achieved little. The large city parties "are, in effect, autonomous satrapies. They act as overlords to the individual constituency associations within the cities. They are largely independent of both Central Office and the provincial area, both in organisation and money."(2) Historically, tradition, size, and relative financial strength have provided Conservative Party city associations with something of a power base in their dealings with Central Office.

1. The Selwyn Lloyd Report. Conservative Central Office, 1963, p.9.
2. Ian Trethowan, The Times, 29.7.67.

Labour Party city organisations have a similar independent tradition but they lack the financial strength which has given power to Conservative city parties. By 1970 many Labour Party city machines were near extinction. Manchester and Liverpool each employed only one secretary organiser, while Birmingham employed two, both of whom were dismissed in April 1971 for reasons of economy.(1) Since 1970 city Labour parties have become increasingly dependent on the services provided by regional offices.

City Labour parties (officially known as "Borough Labour Parties") have long been dominated by city-wide committees whose reliance on trade union funds usually make it unnecessary to press for contributions from members of the constituency parties in their area. "This top-heavy form of organisation often prevented the development of efficient machinery at ward and constituency level."(2) By 1970, however, finances had deteriorated and memberships had slumped. Financial reserves were, in general, exhausted. Most city Labour parties were fighting for survival in the face of the N.C.C., which was determined to improve organisation at the constituency level and reduce the importance of city parties.

The inbuilt hostility between city and region in the Labour Party is the legacy of by-gone years, when the cities were powerful organisational units. Liverpool apart, there are not the deeply-rooted tensions between city and region which characterise the Conservative Party. Contemporary Labour Party city organisations are far too dependent on regional

1. See Birmingham Post 15.4.71., p.1.
2. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, The British General Election of 1970. London, 1971, p.275.

services to be really awkward. Nevertheless, city parties still jealously guard their organisations and are eager to attack regional office at even the faintest suggestion of unjustified intervention. The city parties' independent tradition lingers on, perpetuating city/regional friction.

At the outset it must be admitted that there are major difficulties involved in examining city parties stemming largely from an excessive concern with secrecy in the twin areas of finance and membership. It could be argued that this secrecy emanates from a desire to shield the very inefficiency which both party head offices have resolved to reduce. This chapter focusses on three major cities, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool, as well as smaller cities such as Coventry, Nottingham, and Leicester. The implications of the Brooke Report, 1967, on Conservative Party city organisations, are also examined.

Birmingham

(1) The Conservative Party.

Birmingham, with its thirteen parliamentary constituencies,⁽¹⁾ is the largest provincial city in England. Between 1950 and 1966 there was a long, and often bitter, struggle between area office and the city association. At the end of the Second World War, Geoffrey Lloyd, President of the Birmingham Unionist Association, began to rebuild the city party, and in 1950 H.G. Nicholas wrote:

1. In 1970, prior to the redistribution of Parliamentary constituencies.

"The degree of completeness and complexity which Conservative organisation can reach is best illustrated by the example of Birmingham. Here, in the home of Joseph Chamberlain, where no false modesty debars the frank employment of the term "political machine", the city Unionist Association can claim 'that in no other large centres are the forces of the Conservative Party and Unionists so closely co-ordinated to provide such a powerful organisation; its strength and efficiency are the envy of our friends and the constant despair of our opponents.

"Administration and financial matters are dealt with by the Secretary. The very extensive Women's Organisation is under the supervision of the Women's Organiser, while the Young Unionist movement also has its own organiser. There is a publicity officer responsible for press and relations work... The important work of political education is in the hands of a political education officer. Special organisational matters are dealt with by the organisation officer".(1)

In 1950 E.J. Tranter was appointed Birmingham's chief agent and, under his direction the city party became increasingly centralised. In the 1950's not only did each constituency in the city have an agent employed by the city association, but in addition to the chief agent, there were two assistant chief agents, a Young Conservative organiser, a large secretarial staff, and some thirty paid collectors responsible for collecting small subscriptions throughout the city. It was this centralisation which gave rise to most of the difficulties between area and city during these years. The area alleged that so many professionals were employed centrally that there was little work for the voluntary constituency worker to do. From an area office perspective, any possible financial advantages were outweighed by the organisational disadvantages of a highly centralised collecting scheme requiring little constituency involvement.

1. H.G. Nicholas, The British General Election of 1950, London, 1951, pp.25,26. Nicholas quotes from the Birmingham Unionist Association Yearbook, 1949.

However the organisational independence of the city association enabled it to resist area office pressure to decentralise its organisation.

Theoretically, the thirteen constituency associations affiliated to the Birmingham City Conservative Association have the same relationship with the area agent and the area council as all the other forty-seven constituencies comprising the West Midlands area. In practice, however, their loyalties lie with the city rather than with the more remote area structure. In 1970 all the agents who served the city's constituencies were employed by the city association and all, except the Northfield agent, worked from the city party headquarters at Empire House. The city party, with its chief agent and Young Conservative organiser, had the resources to supply the needs of constituency parties in the city, with the result that area office was rarely utilised.

The appointment of E.J. Tranter as chief agent in 1950 hardly improved city/area relations. Following his arrival in Birmingham, Tranter soon crossed swords with the West Midlands Area Agent, Colonel Ledingham. Tranter resisted Ledingham's attempts to give advice to voluntary workers. On one typical occasion, according to a bitter account by Tranter, Ledingham commented to a voluntary worker about the possibility of sacking Sir Oliver Pritchett as chairman of the city association. Tranter snarled Ledingham about the incident asserting: "when I want your advice about Birmingham I will ask for it - 'til then, keep quiet." In recalling the incident Tranter added "This did not make me very popular."⁽¹⁾ Again, in the early

1. E.J. Tranter, interview, 20.6.70.

1950's, Ledingham fought hard to prevent Tranter becoming elected Secretary of the West Midlands Conservative Agents Association - he failed. The first example cited above serves to indicate the anomalous position of the area agent with respect to a city association. The city's individual constituencies were, and still are, regarded as the province of the city association and not of the area. In general, suggestions from area office are not welcome.

In 1956 Ledingham retired and was replaced as area agent by J.G. Galloway, previously area agent in the Northern area. Believing the city party to be inefficient, Galloway attempted to remedy the position. Tranter, like Galloway a man with a long military pedigree, refused to yield. The result was stalemate. During the years 1956-66 co-operation between city and area was almost non-existent. The Birmingham City Party, unlike financially poor constituencies, had no need to rely on the area either organisationally or financially. The city association acted as an autonomous unit, failing to approach Central Office by the accepted channel, area office. Birmingham regarded itself sufficiently important as to merit direct access to the centre, whether or not Central Office approved.

The presence of the West Midlands Area Office in Birmingham, close to city party headquarters, added to the difficulties of the period 1956-1966. It was all too easy for an overlap of responsibilities to develop. Boundaries of demarcation became blurred and problems inevitably arose. The presence of the area office in Birmingham undermined the position of the city party. The close proximity of the two

offices bred, not only hostility, but also inefficiency. Questions about "who is responsible for what?" in the city frequently occurred; equally frequently recrimination followed. This unsatisfactory arrangement finally induced Galloway to transfer the area office from Birmingham to Leamington Spa. Ivor Freeman, who succeeded Tranter as chief agent in 1969, maintained that "overall, things have improved between Birmingham and the area since area office moved to Leamington".(1)

Galloway regarded Tranter as the major obstacle to efficient organisation in Birmingham. With Geoffrey Lloyd and Sir Oliver Pritchett firmly in the saddle in Birmingham, Galloway made little headway in his campaign to remove Tranter. In 1963, however, Pritchett resigned and was replaced as chairman of the city association by Sir Charles Burman. Ultimately, in view of the declining financial state of the city association (see later), Galloway was able to persuade Burman of the need for change; in 1966 Tranter was "promoted sideways"(2) and became chief finance officer of the city association. The deputy chief agent, Ivor Freeman, became chief political officer, assuming the title chief agent when Tranter finally retired in 1969.

The length of time it took area office to remove Tranter must be seen as a defeat for the area. True, Tranter was finally forced out, but Galloway had been engaged in this battle for some years and, in the event, Tranter was very near retiring age. According to Galloway, the replacement of Tranter is a

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1. I. Freeman, interview, 5.2.70.
 2. J. Galloway, interview, 9.12.69.

a good example of "where and when it is necessary for an area to assert itself".(1) In practice, however, despite Galloway's assertions to the contrary, this incident indicates the relative powerlessness of area office and, ultimately, Central Office, in its dealings with those bastions of independence, the city parties.

Between 1966 and 1970 the relationship between Birmingham city party and West Midlands area office improved somewhat. Freeman, the city new chief agent, appeared to be far less intractable than his predecessor. On a day to day basis there was greater co-operation between city and area. For example, in 1970, no front bench speaker entered Birmingham without prior agreement from area office. As Galloway remarked, "This would not have happened some years ago".(2) In the 1966 General Election three marginal constituencies in Birmingham were supplied, for the first time, with broad sheets produced by the area. Similarly, in city by-elections Birmingham has traditionally used its own agents, but with the reduction, for financial reasons, in the number of full-time agents, the city association began in the late 1960's to rely on agents supplied from outside the city. Between 1956 and 1966, if Birmingham ever needed help from outside, the city party met all the expenses. The Ladywood by-election in 1968 marked something of a change. Three agents from outside the city helped in the by-election and, for the first time, Central Office, because of pressure from the area, met their expenses. This small incident is indicative of improved relations between

1. J. Galloway, interview, 9.12.69.

2. J. Galloway, interview, 9.12.69.

city and area. Nonetheless, Birmingham still prides itself on its independence. As Ivor Freeman has asserted: "It would not really matter if there was no area office, because we are self-sufficient. For matters like speakers we go via the proper channel, which is the area, although we don't always do this. e sometimes go direct to Central Office. Without belittling the importance of the area, it would not make much odds to Birmingham if it did not exist".(1)

Birmingham has its own Central Council, Conservative Political Centre (C.P.C.) Committee, Trade Union Committee, Advisory Committee on Education, Women's Central Council, and F.C. Central Council, a structure which duplicates the area at every level. Because of this, very few Birmingham party members take an active part in area affairs. For Conservatives in Birmingham the city association is the focus of attention in 1970, just as it was twenty years ago.

Historically, a healthy financial position has made Birmingham City Conservative Association a viable entity. By the late 1960's, however, the financial position of the association was much less healthy than it had been only ten years earlier. In 1970 the city association employed only five full-time constituency agents, a chief agent, an assistant chief agent and a Y.C. organiser. Ten years previously there had been an agent in every constituency. It is frequently suggested by city party officials that the root cause of the decline in city parties was the process of industrial amalgamations which took place at this time. It is explained that the numerous small local industrial firms, which traditionally

1. 1. Freeman, interview, 5.2.70.

were the mainstay of city party finances, have either been swallowed up by national concerns or else have amalgamated with other local firms. These larger industrial units, it is claimed, contribute to party funds at the national rather than the local level, that is, if they contribute at all. Certainly, there can be no doubt that in the 1960's money was more difficult to obtain but to place the blame for the financial weakness of city parties solely on industrial amalgamations is questionable. Another reason is that city parties are organisationally top-heavy and rather inefficient. A great deal of wealth within the cities still remains untapped. City parties, unlike constituency associations, appear to rely too much on business contributions and not enough on fund-raising in other ways. However, the precise financial position of city parties remains a closely guarded secret. Whatever the precise state of health, one point is clear: the financial strength of city parties is declining, whether through business amalgamations or for some other reason. Indeed, financial difficulties threaten to erode the traditional independence of the large city machines. By 1970 Liverpool and Bristol had been forced to accept Central Office aid.

In the long term the future of the city parties as viable independent entities is uncertain. More immediately, however, Birmingham City Conservative Association's position appears relatively secure. The 1970 General Election displayed the autonomy of the city association. During the campaign Freeman had little or no contact with either Central Office or area office. The area agent did not even request canvass returns

during the campaign. The major exception to this picture of non-communication occurred over Edward Heath's visit to Birmingham. This demanded and produced a considerable amount of co-operation between area and city. The Birmingham chief agent was obviously proud of the way the city association, despite the shortage of full-time agents, had managed to cope with the election without any significant help from the area. To quote Freeman: "The area seemed most concerned with getting socialist election addresses. This amused us. I know they are under pressure from London. They came around here the day before polling day for these. Apart from this they did not come to visit us at all. I am not complaining about this. I would not be grateful if area was breathing down our necks all the time."(1)

(11) The Labour Party

In 1948, H.R. Underhill was appointed West Midlands Regional Organiser of the Labour Party, against competition from Harold Nash, Secretary of the Birmingham Borough Labour Party, who also applied for the job. Reputedly, however, there was little ill-feeling between city and region as a direct result of Nash's defeat. Indeed, throughout the 1950's, the relationship between Birmingham Borough Labour Party and regional office was surprisingly amicable. This was because regional office left the city party almost entirely alone. Underhill made no attempt to dictate to the city party. In his own words, he "never rode the big horse with Birmingham".(2)

1. 1. Freeman, interview, 3.7.70.

2. H.R. Underhill, interview, 21.1.70.

The relationship between city and region produced few tensions "so long as there was no bossing"(1) by the regional organiser.

Writing of Birmingham in 1964, Anthony Howard observed:

"Here, if anywhere, there exists a totally centralised machine - very largely the creation of one of the party's finest organisers, Harold Nash, who until his death earlier this year had in effect been Birmingham's Borough Labour Party. Nash had none of the professional caution of most of Labour's paid officials, he made no pretence of neutrality and frequently descended from the umpire's box into the arena to make sure that control of a constituency or the award of a parliamentary nomination went the way he had already decided it ought to go".(2)

The Birmingham organisation was praised by the Wilson Report on Party Organisation, 1955: "We must record our view that in general (Birmingham being the one exception), the stress on city parties had led to a progressive withering away of the C.L.P.'s. In general our efficiency as a machine for fighting parliamentary elections is sacrificed to municipal considerations".(3) Despite the optimism of the Wilson Report, constituency Labour parties in Birmingham were rapidly becoming nonentities. The highly centralised machine, with all five organisational assistants employed by the city party, was sapping the constituency parties of their activists. The centralised machine which Nash developed was financially successful, but organisationally suspect. Regional office recognised the dangers of excessive centralisation. Once again, however, there was "no bossing"(4) by the region.

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1. H.R. Underhill, interview, 24.1.70.
 2. Anthony Howard, New Statesman, 7.8.64., p.170.
 3. 1955 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.81.
 4. H.R. Underhill, interview, 27.1.70.

Nevertheless, tension was never far below the surface. An exchange in the pages of the Labour Organiser in 1959 provides an insight into the underlying city/region relationship. The whole affair centred around whether the city or the region should take the credit for the collection of postal votes in Birmingham during the 1959 General Election. In the October/November edition of the Labour Organiser Underhill asserted that regional office had secured nearly 1000 votes for Birmingham constituencies. This assertion provoked a reply from one of the Borough party members, Mrs. Joan Tomlinson. She wrote: "Mr. Underhill's article in the November issue of the Labour Organiser gives the impression that the only work done in securing postal votes in Birmingham was that undertaken in securing postal votes in Birmingham was that undertaken by the regional office. This is not so. The Birmingham Borough Labour Party had myself working as the Postal Vote Officer for four months prior to the General Election."(1)

Underhill had the last word. In a reply to Mrs. Tomlinson he wrote:

"My notes did not deal with postal work done in Birmingham, but in view of Mrs. Tomlinson's comments, I must now do so. From the regional office canvassing we passed to the Borough party nearly 1,000 R.P.F. 8's for Birmingham constituencies....

"It is interesting to note that the total postal vote in Birmingham was 7,760, an increase of 1,751 compared with 1955. After subtracting the postal votes secured as a result of regional office

1. Labour Organiser, December 1959, Vol. 38, No. 453, p. 229.

activity there are only 453 additional postal votes for the whole of Birmingham..... It is clear that generally the Birmingham constituency parties did not achieve much success in securing additional R.P.'s."(1)

Such disputes typify the relationships at this level of party organisation. The Borough party regarded Underhill's article as a slight on its own organising ability and as such, it needed a reply.

The Nash era in Birmingham ended when Nash died, just before the 1964 General Election. L.R. Chamberlain, the Assistant Regional Organiser in the West Midlands, was left to oversee the campaign in Birmingham. According to Chamberlain, this undoubtedly "helped to reduce earlier suspicion"(2) between city and region. The A.R.O. was even given a presentation by the grateful city party after the election.

Following Nash's death in 1964, the party's finances deteriorated and the number of full-time employees decreased. The party could no longer afford the relatively large staff which had characterised the Nash regime. It was in this situation that regional office assumed a new significance. With the Borough party increasingly unable to stand on its own feet, the region became important over a whole range of organisational matters which had traditionally been the province of the Borough party. There remained, however, a certain local pride. The Borough party secretary in 1970, Mr. R. Knowles, while admitting some contact with the regional office, was eager to assert that he would be very concerned if they "pushed their noses into municipal affairs".(3) In 1970, therefore,

1. Labour Organiser, December 1959, Vol.38, No.450, p.230.
2. L.R. Chamberlain, interview, 18.11.69.
3. R. Knowles, interview, 1.11.70.

Birmingham Borough Labour Party was clinging desperately to its last grain of independence, as can be seen during the redistribution of Parliamentary constituencies in 1970/71.

Late in 1970 regional organisers were instructed by the N.E.C. to set up new constituency parties, following the re-organisation of constituency boundaries. Regional organisers acted as N.E.C. representatives in this task of closing down old and establishing new constituency parties. In Birmingham, the Borough party resented regional office going over its head to convene meetings in constituencies within the city. Eventually a compromise was reached whereby regional office called the meetings but the clerical work in connection with the meetings was done by the Borough party and Borough party notepaper was used in all communications. This compromise salvaged Borough party pride.

There was friction during the Ladywood by-election in 1968 when, according to the Borough party secretary "They (the regional office) did try and come in and take over".(1) The claim of the Borough party that it resisted the challenge hardly stands up. Regional office took an active part in the campaign. Chamberlain, now regional organiser, acted as transport officer and the assistant regional organiser, W. Burley, acted as publicity officer throughout the campaign.

Birmingham Borough Labour Party partly duplicates the regional council structure; the city has its own Women's and Youth sections. There is, consequently, very little interest within the city for the democratic side of regional organisation.

1. R. Knowles, interview, 1.11.70.

This trend of non-involvement with the regional office first manifested itself when Nash was Borough party secretary. The city organisation has always come first in Birmingham, with the region a poor second.

Financial strength is needed if a city party is to resist regional encroachment. A viable city party must have a strong financial base if it is to provide essential services for its member constituencies. In the early 1950's Birmingham Borough Labour Party had some £30,000 in the bank, but this was not invested and consequently disappeared over the years. By 1970, the party's annual income had dropped to £7,800. At this time the party employed one organiser/secretary, one assistant organiser and two clerks. To function at all efficiently the party needed an annual income of some £10,000 per year. The annual deficit was, therefore, about £2,200.(1) The extent of the Borough Party's financial crisis was revealed in 1971. At the annual meeting on 14th April 1971, the party decided to dismiss its two organisers and one clerk because of the financial situation which the party faced. The saving per year was estimated at £4,700. The Birmingham Post reported: "Although the party's annual financial report will show that last year's deficit is not very large, it is the future that looks black."(2)

The 1971 crisis meant that regional office virtually assumed control in the city. With no staff except one clerk, the Borough party became reliant on the region on even routine

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1. R. Knowles, interview, 1.11.70.
 2. The Birmingham Post, 14th April 1971, p.14

organisational matters. The Birmingham Post reported on 16th April 1 71 that "the West Midlands Region of the Labour Party is preparing to give more assistance in running the movement's affairs within the city".(1) The financial strength of the Borough Party in the 1950's had provided a power-base for the city in its relationship with the region. During the 1960's the Borough Party and regional office lived somewhat uneasily side by side. By 1971 the Borough Party was financially poor and organisationally weak. Through force of circumstances, therefore, Birmingham Borough Labour Party had become increasingly dependent upon regional office.

Manchester

(1) The Conservative Party

In Manchester, the friction which exists between city and area stems from the position of the North Western Area office in the city centre. The chief agent of the city association in 1970, Mr. A. Bowen-Gotham, lamented: "Efficiency and organisation is what concerns me. Voluntary workers and some professionals don't know the difference between the area and the city association office. The press particularly tend to get muddled and ring area office for something about Manchester. Sometimes the area is caught off its guard and it issues press statements which contradict, innocently, a decision already taken by the city party."(2) The city association is of the opinion that the area is undercutting its power. In such conditions distrust, and even open hostility, have flourished.

1. The Birmingham Post, 16th April 1971, p.16.

2. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.

Too often lines appear to have been crossed and, as a consequence, effort is duplicated. In September 1959, for example, Mr. Harold MacMillan opened the Conservative election campaign from Belle Vue in Manchester. "Where most Conservatives would recall the occasion proudly, the city party remembers it with some bitterness... 'It cost us all of £500 and the only credit went to the area office'." (1) This incident, while petty in the extreme, is indicative of the depth of the city/area conflict in Manchester. It seems, however, that the tension between area and city began to ease somewhat in 1966 when the North West Area Agent, Richard Webster, was promoted to the position of Director of Organisation of the Conservative Party and moved to London. His successor, Anthony Garner, moved with circumspection from the outset. The result has been far less intervention by the area agent in city politics.

During the early 1960's relations between city and area reached a very low ebb. An incident reported to the author by Bowen-Gotham reflects the relationship: "A city M.P. was thinking about resigning and he should have come to the city party to talk about this, but he went to area office, simply because it was in Manchester. This led to great bitterness between the two, especially as I only found out by accident about the whole incident. It was our province, not the area's, and the area should not have dealt with it." (2)

A major area/city tension in Manchester has been finance. Central Office has attempted to raise money in Manchester

1. Anthony Howard, "City Before Party", New Statesman, 14.8.64., p.202.
2. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.

from sources which the city party has claimed as its own. Accusations of poaching, particularly in the 1960's when the city party had its back to the wall financially, have caused great bitterness. Finance aside, however, petty aggravations remain in city/area relations in Manchester. For example, as Bowen-Gotham asserted, the area occasionally organises meetings in Manchester "and we know nothing about them".(1) This has occurred particularly on the Women's, Y.C., C.P.C. and Trade Union side. Manchester City Conservative Association claims that it is frequently not informed about meetings taking place within the city boundaries. Matters such as these serve to exacerbate an already strained relationship.

Bowen-Gotham alleged that the presence of area office in Manchester has resulted in the area creaming-off potential committee material, so that the city party's sectional committees are either poorly supported or non-existent. It is felt that because the area office is situated in Manchester, people who would normally join the city association committees sit on area committees. For example, the city party has no trade union committee. It has no education or C.P.C. committees. Bowen-Gotham alleges that the city party has been sapped of some of its energy by the presence of area office in Manchester. The truthfulness or otherwise of these allegations are, in one sense immaterial. "Creaming-off" provides a pretext for resentment against the area, and it enables the shortcomings of the city party to be blamed on the area. In a very real sense area office is the ideal scapegoat for an inefficient city machine.

1. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.

Evidence of the tensions which remain in Manchester were well illustrated during an interview in 1970, with the chief agent. In February 1970 a local government forum, addressed by Peter Walker and his team, was held in Manchester. This was essentially a city party venture organised by Bowen-Gotham. Inadvertently the author suggested, when introducing the topic, that area office had organised a local government forum in the city. Bowen-Gotham made no attempt to hide his resentment when he thought that the area was trying to take the credit for organising the meeting. He strongly emphasised that it was organised by the city association.(1)

The 1969 annual report of the City of Manchester Conservative Association Central Executive Council was diplomatic in its discussion of area organisation: "We wish to record our appreciation of the interest which the Area Chairman, Mr. Percy Stephenson, and the Area Honorary Treasurer, Mr. Charles Johnston, have shown in the city affairs during the year. We also thank Mr. A.S. Garner, the North West Area Agent, for his interest and assistance... It is our wish to work as closely as possible with the officers of the North West Area."(2)

In reply to the question "Would it really matter if there were no area office in Manchester?" Bowen-Gotham said: "It would be a tremendous improvement because it would cut out the frustrations which exist at present." "Would you lose anything?" "No, Manchester would" he added, "be more efficient without them".(3)

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1. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.
 2. City of Manchester Conservative Association, Annual Report of the Central Executive Council for the year 1969.
 3. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.

(11) The Labour Party

By 1970 Manchester Borough Labour Party was in no position to challenge the region. Like Birmingham it was financially impoverished; it had become increasingly reliant upon the advice and services of regional office. Writing in 1964, Anthony Howard observed:

"Manchester today is in no way an entity; it is the empty shell of the vast conurbation that has grown out of it; and by living firmly in a nostalgic past, the political parties have paid a heavy price in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. The Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties all maintain a separate Manchester organisation but in each case the shadow of the regional office (also with its area headquarters within the city's boundaries) falls heavily over them. It is most marked perhaps in the case of the Labour Party. The Wilson Report of 1955 wanted no time in discussing Manchester in terms of the problems created for constituencies by the maintenance of a centralised city party. It did not need to, for the Manchester City Labour Party had obliged Harold Wilson by doing what at that time he was urging other city parties to do elsewhere; it had almost ceased to exist. Even today (with a net income of under £1,000 per annum - only £7 of it from the constituencies that make up the city) it is still desperately trying to redeem a backlog of debt... the battle has already been won by the regional office over the city organisation".(1)

During the post-war years the power of the city party steadily declined. P. Wallis, North West Regional Organiser from 1936-1966, was a critic of city party machines. He believed that responsibility for organisation in cities should reside at the constituency level. Wallis observed: "The City Labour Party is a self-perpetuating organisation which does little. To keep its office and secretary, it is constantly concerned with making money. It makes little organisational

1. Anthony Howard, New Statesman, 14.8.64.

impact". Nevertheless Wallis was prepared to admit that "It does maintain contact with the City Council Labour Group and it also promotes candidates for the city council, and it deals with this side very efficiently".(1)

Despite the dominance of regional office, there has always been some conflict between city and region. The proximity of regional office to the Town Hall has, over the years, meant that leading city representatives tended, purely out of convenience, to use regional office rather than the city party offices for advice and information. This was resented by the city party. To quote Wallis, "There was a bit of jealousy. The city secretary was conscious that people looked to regional office, not the city, for advice."(2) To Wallis this seemed perfectly natural because, he alleged with considerable justification, "we were better equipped".(3) As in Birmingham, the continuing financial plight of the city party played into the hands of regional office. The region has been able to provide a standard of service which is well beyond the rather limited resources of the city party. While tensions inevitably still exist in Manchester they are relatively insignificant when compared with those in the late 1960's between regional office and the Borough Labour Party in Liverpool.

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1. R. Wallis, interview, 3.5.70.
 2. R. Wallis, interview. 3.5.70.
 3. R. Wallis, interview, 3.5.70.

Liverpool

(i) The Conservative Party

Like both Birmingham and Manchester, Liverpool Conservative Association has a tradition of independence, but financial difficulties in the 1960's allowed Central Office to draw Liverpool more into the mainstream of party organisation.

Liverpool has had a long history of independence. Anthony Howard quotes Sir Ernest Stacey, Chairman of the Liverpool City Conservative Association in 1964, as saying: "What's that about Macleod?... Well, let me tell you something. He's had one or two bumps with me and I think you'll find he's singing a rather different tune now"... "Blakenham? Yes, he came up during the by-election and we saw him to the airport and put him on the plane back."(1)

Howard continued:

"Sadly, however, it is nowadays somewhat without backing. The years of glory have departed for the Liverpool Conservatives and even their days of autonomy seem to be numbered. The by-election in Scotland last June (June 1964) marked perhaps the moment when the writing first became clearly visible on the wall. From the beginning the Liverpool Conservative Association, true to its historical tradition, had insisted that it alone would run the campaign and that it would brook no interference, whether from party headquarters or from the regional office in Manchester. The result was a drop of 7,500 in the Conservative vote and the biggest swing to Labour (12½ per cent) of any by-election this year. Understandably there swiftly followed some pretty heavy hints in the Conservative press that on this basis Liverpool would very soon be required to mend its ways or fall into line with standard party organisation in the rest of the country".(2)

1. Anthony Howard, "Cook County U.K.", New Statesman, 31st July 1964, p.138.

2. Ibid., p.138.

Before 1955 Liverpool had little or no contact with area office but this attitude is dying with the passing of the old guard, improved communications and the nationalisation of politics."(1) In 1956 Sir Ernest Stacey was appointed Chairman of the Liverpool Association. There appears to have been a period of improved relations following his appointment, but some years later there followed a "blazing row" which served to set back what improvement had been made. The vengeance here stems from a reluctance in Liverpool to divulge the cause of the dispute.

By 1970 Liverpool, like Birmingham and Manchester, was struggling financially. The party was bled out of a financial crisis in the 1950's, thanks to a loan from Central Office. The weak financial situation has enabled Central Office to intervene in Liverpool. Central Office appears determined to gain entry into all the large cities in order to tap more effectively the commercial and industrial wealth at present monopolised by city parties. Liverpool is no exception to this rule. W.G. Hanlon, Deputy Central Office Agent (Liverpool), asserted that "finances are the main point of conflict with the area and Central Office".(2)

Trouble first arose here when Central Office offered Liverpool the first £10 of all donations collected in the city. Liverpool rejected this out of hand. Today the City Party receives one third of all monies collected by the Central Board of Finance (on behalf of the Central Office). The competition for money in Liverpool has not made for good relations between area and city.

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1. W.G. Hanlon, Deputy Central Office Agent (Liverpool), interview, 8.4.70.
 2. W.G. Hanlon, interview, 8.4.70.

11. The Labour Party

"Liverpool looks on itself as a mini-region. It has no leaning to anything run from Manchester".(1) Regional office, situated in Manchester, has over the years been able to exert very little influence in Liverpool. At best the relationship has been cool, at worst positively hostile.

From the establishment of the North West Regional Council in 1938 until his retirement in 1966, R. Wallis was North West regional Organiser of the Labour Party. During this time Liverpool's resentment of the regional organiser as a representative of Transport House was usually kept in check. Regional office interfered very little in the internal organisation of the Joint Trades Council and Labour Party. Wallis went out of his way to cultivate friendships in the city and this obviously helped to establish a relatively friendly relationship. More substantially, for some twenty years, Wallis frustrated the efforts of the N.E.C. and the T.U.C. to split the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party into two separate organisations. In 1966 Wallis was replaced at regional office by P. Carmody, formerly South+West Regional Organiser. This marked the beginning of a deterioration in relations between city and region.

Even in the Wallis era, however, suspicion of regional office was never far below the surface, as the following incident indicates. In the late 1950's A.A. Johnson, the Assistant Regional Organiser in the North West attended a party meeting in Liverpool and was sitting on the platform. During

1. S. Fraser, Secretary of the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party until 1970, interview, B.A.70.

the main debate Johnson turned and said something to the delegate sitting next to him. The delegate smiled, and immediately one of the leaders of Liverpool Labour Party jumped to his feet, demanding to know what instructions had been given by the regional official to the delegate. (1) Suspicion was rife. This Liverpool leader could not imagine that Johnson's remark was simply an irrelevant joke. This incident conveys the atmosphere which existed in Liverpool during the 1950's and which became further intensified some years later.

By the late 1960's the breach between region and city had widened wide and hostility was overt. Regional office wanted it made plain that Liverpool was an integral part of the North East region. Carmody, at regional office, appeared determined to split the joint Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party. In so doing he was following an N.E.C. directive to split the party. Playing an instrumental part in splitting such a popular unit hardly enhanced the standing of regional office on Merseyside. To understand the contemporary relationship between Liverpool and regional office it is necessary to outline the main points of this dispute.

In the early 1960's the regional office of the Transport and General Workers Union requested an enquiry into Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party. The reasons for the enquiry were never made public. The outcome of the enquiry, held in 1962, was a proposal to separate the joint Trades Council and Labour Party thereby splitting the industrial and political wings of the movement in Liverpool. Largely due to the efforts

1. A.A. Johnson, interview, 19.12.68.

of allies at regional office, the decision to separate the two bodies was repeatedly postponed. The N.E.C. did not pursue the matter because of the General Elections in 1964 and 1966. In August 1967, however, the Secretary of the Trades Council and Labour Party received a letter from Sara Barker, National Agent of the Labour Party, informing him that she and a representative of the T.U.C. wished to meet the executive committee of the Trades Council and Labour Party in order to implement the 1962 decision.

Nothing further happened until 27th November 1968, when a letter was sent by the national agent informing the Secretary of the Trades Council and Labour Party that the North West regional organiser would be attending the next meeting of the Trades Council and Labour Party, where he would outline the situation. On the 13th December 1968, Carmody, now regional organiser, attended the Executive Committee's meeting, acting for the Labour Party's N.E.C. He announced that as from 1st January 1969 a new Borough party would be set up. In fact, "the new Borough Labour Party was formed on 20th February 1969" (1) Writing in Tribune, Eric Heffer, M.P., maintained: "The feeling in Liverpool is that the real reasons behind the insistence on the separation are political. The Liverpool Party has a long history of support for left-wing views. It has always had a turbulent history and is not easily pushed around".(2)

Whatever the real reasons for dismantling the Trades Council and Labour Party, there can be no doubt that it was

1. Liverpool Borough Labour Party, Annual Report 1966/70, p.1.
2. Eric Heffer, M.P., Tribune, 24th January 1969, Vol 33, No.4, p.6,7.

forced through by the N.E.C. against the wishes of most people in the Liverpool Labour movement. Carmody played an active role in the split, stretching to breaking point the city party/regional relationship. Wallis warned Carmody against carrying out the N.E.C.'s directive to split the Labour movement in Liverpool, but Carmody ignored the advice. He might have satisfied the N.E.C. by adopting his course of action, but in the process he alienated Liverpool. Alienating such a large section of his region was a high price for Carmody to pay at the outset of his career in the North West. By 1970 relations between Liverpool and regional office had reached a very low ebb.

Another major cause of discontent in the late 1960's was the way in which regional office continually by-passed the city Labour party office in its dealings with constituencies in Liverpool. There was, at this time, little or no co-operation between the region and the Labour movement in Liverpool. In the late 1960's and in 1970 the regional organiser employed one of his A.R.O.'s on Merseyside, but this assistant was rarely seen at city party headquarters. In his dealings with Liverpool constituencies this A.R.O., Dennis Kerry, tended to ignore the Trades Council and Labour Party's headquarters at Transport House, Liverpool.

One could draw upon numerous examples to illustrate the underlying friction in the late 1960's between Liverpool and the region. One instance will suffice. In November 1967 Simon Fraser, Secretary of the Trades Council and Labour Party, produced a booklet, Plan for Progress, in which he proposed a new structure for the Labour Party in Liverpool. In it,

Fraser maintained that the future for the city lay in a highly efficient central organisation which would draw together all the talents of Party members in the city and use them as a kind of "think tank" which would feed wards and C.D.'s with ideas, methods and enthusiasm.(1) An accompanying proposal for the central collection of membership dues by the city party drew city and region into conflict. What annoyed Liverpool was that Carmody at regional office dismissed the proposals as impractical without even visiting Liverpool to discuss them. In a similar vein, Fraser wanted to bring together all youth organisations in Liverpool to discuss common issues. Regional office prevented him from doing this in his capacity as secretary of the Borough Labour Party because it conflicted with the Party Constitution. Fraser therefore called these meetings in his capacity as secretary of the Liverpool Trades Council.

Thus, by 1970, there was very little co-operation between Liverpool and regional office. Indeed, there remained a good deal of hostility, much of it stemming from the retirement of G. Allie in 1966 and the subsequent separation of the joint Trades Council and Labour Party. Traditionally, "Liverpool has shown no great interest in the region at all".(2) In the late 1960's apathy turned to hostility.

The Smaller Cities

(a) The Conservative Party

In Coventry the three constituency parties share the same headquarters in the city, but there is no chief agent. Like

1. Liverpool Borough Labour Party Annual Report, 1969/70, p.1.

2. B. Fraser, interview, 8.4.70.

the bigger city associations, Coventry suffered financially during the 1960's. In 1969 sixty per cent of the party's income came from collective efforts such as jumble sales, and forty per cent from individual subscriptions and industry.(1) In 1970 Coventry Conservative Association employed only two agents and two clerical assistants, whereas between 1957 and 1959 there had been four agents in the city.

While Coventry lacks the power base that larger city parties possess, there nevertheless exists a spirit of independence. The senior Coventry agent in 1970, Aubrey Nichols, had been in the agency service for forty years and was, therefore, by no means as dependent on area office as many of his younger, less experienced colleagues. Perhaps it was Nichol's experience which prompted him to assert "We in Coventry could manage without the area."(2)

In both Nottingham and Leicester there exist City Federations which act as co-ordinating committees for the constituency parties. Each constituency party, however, has separate premises. The Secretary of each Federation, one of the city agents, has no formal authority over the other agents. The Federations act essentially as co-ordinating committees for local government activities, something which is regarded as especially important in Nottingham. Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham are, therefore, little different from ordinary constituency associations in their relationships with the area. In each of these cities the constituencies, rather than the city associations, are the key organisational units.

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1. A. Nichols, Agent, Coventry North and East, interview, 18.5.70.
 2. A. Nichols, interview, 18.5.70.

(b) The Labour Party

The Wilson Report on Party Organisation (1955) came out strongly against highly centralised city parties. Leicester came in for especially harsh criticism:

"I should like to draw attention to the position of Leicester where for all practical purposes there are virtually no constituency parties in existence. The whole organisation such as it is, is at the city or ward level... In practice this means that the C.L.P.'s are dormant except at election times... The work of the Party is confined to wards and the City Party. Thus, as happened in 1955, when a General Election is announced, C.L.P. machinery has to be created de novo and set to work. In practice the C.L.P. organisation in the 1955 election was almost non-existent".(1)

Following the Wilson Report, there were some organisational changes in Leicester and the financial state of the City Party meant that it was in no position to resist the re-organisation, although it was extremely unpopular with a large section of the Party. In 1970 the secretary of the City Party, Gordon Parker, was a National Agency Scheme appointment who worked closely with regional office, as would any such agent.

In Nottingham there was one full-time organiser servicing two constituencies, Nottingham South and West, in 1970. Once again, the agent was a National Agency Scheme appointment and regional office therefore had considerable influence. In any event, regional office, being situated in Nottingham has always dealt with a good deal of organising work in the city. This situation, far from producing tension, has produced co-operation from a grateful Nottingham.

Coventry Borough Labour Party has a tradition of political extremism and organisational independence. In 1970, however, its relationship with regional office was amicable, mainly

1. 1955 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.80.

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1. 1955 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.80.

because, having no professional organiser or agent, Coventry was heavily dependent upon regional office for advice and help. According to the Borough Party Secretary in 1970, Mr. J. Daly, "Relations between the two are very good".(1)

The Brooke Report, 1967

"The Tories' city associations are legacies from the days when the Chamberlains in Birmingham and the formidable Alderman Selvidge in Liverpool were the pacemakers of political organisation, and so long as they delivered the votes no one in London challenged their independence."(2) The poor showing by the cities in the 1964 and 1966 General Elections determined the Conservative leadership to draw city parties more into the Central Office orbit. Central Office was particularly concerned with the overcentralisation and electoral inefficiency of the large city associations. In December 1966, therefore, Edward du Cann, Conservative Party Chairman, set up a committee, headed by Lord Brooke of Cumnor, to look into party organisation in those cities with separate city associations. The members of the Committee of Inquiry were:

Lord Brooke of Cumnor (Chairman)
Sir Charles Burman
Mr. Peter Crossman
Mrs. C.M. Hartland
Alderman Herbert Redfearn

The Committee was, "to inquire into the functions and workings of City Associations and Constituency Associations within Cities and the relationship of both these bodies to

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1. G. Daly, interview, 24.1.70.
 2. I. Trethowan, "Brooke's answer to Tory provincial decay", The Times, June 29th 1967. This article was an official leak of the Brooke Report, which was not published. See also "The Cities Enquiry" in Conservative Agents Journal, September 1967.

Provincial Areas".(1) There were four main problems before the Committee: the movement from the cities to the suburbs; finance; winning back local government seats; winning back Parliamentary seats. The loss of seats in the eight large cities which Brooke examined (2) was proportionately greater than over the country as a whole in both 1964 and 1966.

The Brooke Committee found that city associations had become seriously run down. They found that half the individual constituencies had no full-time Conservative agent and that, without agents at the constituency level, the constituency associations had become moribund, tending to leave active organisation more and more to the city association and the chief agent. In consequence Brooke found low individual membership, a shortage of workers, and too little money raised.(3) They also found that relations between city associations and the area organisation often barely existed at all, or else were clouded by suspicion. The independence of the city associations meant, as Brooke observed, little or no contact between city and area. In the light of this situation, the Brooke Committee recommended certain structural changes in the city/area relationship. The aim of the recommendations was to extend Central Office influence into the cities by interlocking the cities more closely with the areas. Brooke proposed that the city chief agents should become deputy Central Office area agents and be paid by Central Office instead of by the city association. The aim was to make the area the overall authority, with the city an important

1. Taken from a circular letter from the Conservative Party Chairman to constituency chairmen, December 1966.
2. Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol, Bradford and Hull.
3. From Trethowan, op.cit. The article provides the sole source of information.

integral component.

Traditionally, the city parties have had a monopoly of the wealth in the cities (even though much has been untapped). The great commercial and industrial wealth of the cities has long been a cause of great concern to Central Office, which has repeatedly complained that the city associations have not fully exploited the tremendous wealth of the cities. The intransigence of the cities has prevented Central Office from collecting on a large scale within the cities, a source of much resentment nationally since it is felt that many firms which refuse to contribute locally would contribute to national party funds. The Brooke Report emphasised that the cities should contribute more money to the party's national work. It therefore proposed that the city associations be brought under the control of the party's Central Board of Finance. In the fields of both organisation and finance the Brooke Report recommended that Central Office should have greater influence at the city level.

The reaction of the city parties to the Brooke proposals was mixed. In the late 1960's Liverpool and Bristol were in financial difficulties. They had little alternative but to succumb to the financially attractive bait. By 1970 their chief agents had become deputy Central Office area agents and their salaries were paid by Central Office instead of by the city associations. Central Office will, in future, after consultation with the city party, be able to appoint its own nominee to head the professional organisation of the Liverpool Conservative Association, a not inconsiderable power.

Birmingham City Conservative Association submitted evidence to Brooke in which it proposed that the city should be considered as an area in its own right. This was rejected by Brooke. In Birmingham Brooke's findings "got a very cool reception".(1) To the Birmingham constituencies the "Brooke Report looked like a take-over bid by Central Office", (2) or as Aubrey Nichols, agent in Coventry, remarked, "It savours of nationalisation".(3) The overriding feeling in Birmingham was that Central Office was anxious to push the Brooke Report through in order to gain access to the sources of finance within the city. To the Birmingham chief agent "It seemed as though Central Office was trying to bring the cities closer into its orbit and this was resented." (4)

The Brooke Report received an equally hostile reception in Manchester. The party convened a meeting of its Executive Council, some one hundred people. Bowen-Gotham described the city party's reaction as "quite extra-ordinary". "The meeting was unanimous. Not one hand was raised in support of the Brooke scheme." (5) As one speaker at the meeting asserted, "I don't want to have any dictation from outside". In Manchester, as in Birmingham, the impression was that Central Office was anxious to tap the commercial and industrial wealth of the city - a notion which the city party found repugnant.

The chief agent in Manchester was more sceptical than most about the Brooke Report: "The excuse for setting up the

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1. I. Freeman, interview, 5.2.70.
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 3. A. Nichols, interview, 18.5.70.
 4. I. Freeman, interview, 5.2.70.
 5. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.

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Brooke Committee was that the cities did so badly in 1961. but nobody did well... The conclusions of the Brooke Committee were written before they sat. Central Office and the party leadership decided what they wanted and then they set up a committee to produce the results they wanted. Nobody is naive enough to imagine they just set up a committee to examine the problem."(1)

Bowen-Gotham deemed it an insult to be offered the position of deputy Central Office area agent. To accept such a position would, he maintained, "be almost a confession of failure".(2) As chief agent in Manchester, Bowen-Gotham was earning more than most area agents, let alone their deputies. No doubt Bowen-Gotham's personal hostility towards the Brooke proposals rubbed off onto members of the city association. In view of the poor relationship between city and area, Manchester's rejection of the Brooke Report was almost inevitable.

Summary

Prior to the 1970 General Election Conservative Central Office had failed to break down the parochialism of the city machines examined in this thesis. As the Party's Director of Organisation observed, "The cities are dedicated to remaining outside any form of co-operation with Central Office".(3) In 1970 Birmingham and Manchester remained "independent islands"(4) and, as such, were a thorn in the side of Central Office.

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1. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.
 2. A. Bowen-Gotham, interview, 7.4.70.
 3. R. Webster, Director of Organisation, interview, 11.11.70.
 4. R. Webster, interview, 11.11.70.

with the exception of Liverpool and Bristol, the Brooke Report proposals came to nothing, but they were not pushed too hard by Central Office because of the proximity of a General Election. To have caused unrest immediately before a General Election campaign would have been unwise.

In 1970/71 Central Office was hoping that, with the movement of population out of the city centres, city associations would die a natural death. Financial and organisational inefficiency has been the root cause of the tensions between Central (Area) Office and the city parties. Following the 1970 General Election, Central Office set out to make further inroads into city finances. It appeared determined to tap the vast commercial and industrial wealth of the large city centres, but Birmingham and Manchester were equally determined to resist such incursions. Central Office knew only too well that it would find the independent traditions of the city associations in Manchester and Birmingham difficult to undermine. All attempts to integrate the cities into the area structure seem likely to face considerable opposition.

Regional and area organisers have limited influence. Financially and organisationally weak parties, whether at the city or the constituency level, are, however, to some degree reliant on the services which are provided by regional and area offices.

The population movement from the city centres, coupled with local government re-organisation, could well hasten the decline of the cities. Alternatively, the re-organisation of local government in April 1974, by creating large new Metropolitan Counties in the conurbations, may result in the

development of metropolitan party organisations, far more formidable to the area/regional level than the old city parties. In any event, the deeply rooted traditions of hostility between city parties and regional/area offices hardly augers well for future co-operation. At the city party level, as well as at the constituency level, the influence which a regional organiser or area agent can exert is determined by the needs, dispositions and resources of the party unit in question.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE AMATEUR/PROFESSIONAL REGIONAL RELATIONSHIP

This thesis is primarily concerned with examining the role of professional party bureaucrats at the regional and area level. In order to put this work into perspective, however, it is necessary to analyse the democratic structure within which organisers at this level are often obliged to operate. Writing about Conservative Party organisation, Ian Gilmour has observed: "Like other bureaucracies, the party bureaucracy has increased its power at the expense of the elected element. Although there are a number of committees of the National Union which meet at Central Office and which advise the party on various matters, all these bodies are more consent-gaining than decision-taking institutions. Central Office in no way controls the elected leaders of the party in Parliament, - indeed it has remained firmly in their grip - but it largely controls the elected part of the party organisation."⁽¹⁾ The democratic structures at the intermediate level in both parties are certainly influenced, if not controlled, by the regional and area organisers. While this chapter provides a brief analysis of democratic organisation at the regional level, a more complete picture of the formal framework of regional and area organisation is presented in Appendix A.

The Democratic Environment

In the Conservative Party each provincial area has an area council with up to 1,200 members nominated by constituency

1. Ian Gilmour, The Body Politic, London, 1969. This conclusion should be balanced against that in M. Pinto-Duschinsky, "Central Office and Power in the Conservative Party", Political Studies, Vol.XX, No.1, March 1972, pp.1-16.

associations. In the West Midlands, for example, 1,140 delegates were eligible to attend the 1970 annual meeting of the Area Council. In the North West 957 people were invited to the Area Council's annual meeting in 1969. In practice, however, the average attendance tends to be much lower.(1) Half-yearly meetings of the smaller East Midlands Area Council were abandoned in the late 1960's because they were poorly supported, often with less than 100 people present. Indeed, from the mid-1960's the annual meeting of the East Midlands Area Council has been held on a Monday evening. Area Council meetings are, therefore, formal affairs at which there is little participation by constituency representatives. The formal nature of these meetings can be illustrated by the East Midlands 1970 agenda:

1. President's opening remarks.
2. Apologies for absence.
3. Minutes of the Area Council Annual General Meeting, 21st April, 1969.
4. To receive the Annual Report for 1969/70.
5. Vote of thanks to the returning officers.
6. Election of officers.
7. To elect one representative to the National Union Central Council.
8. To elect representatives of area committees to the National Union Central Council.
9. To confirm the election of the Chairman and one Honorary Treasurer to the National Union Executive Committee.
10. To confirm the election of the Women's, Young Conservative and Trade Unionist representatives to the National Union Executive Committee.
11. To confirm the election of the three additional representatives to the National Union Executive Committee.
12. Mr. Michael Heseltine, M.P.
13. Adoption of Standing Orders.
14. Notices of Motion. (2)

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1. In 1971, for example, there were 300 people present at the West Midlands Area annual meeting. This was regarded as a good attendance by the West Midlands Area Agent. (J. Galloway, interview, June 1971.)
 2. 1969-70 Annual Report, East Midlands Area Council.

There is always a front bench spokesman at area council annual meetings, in the same way that Labour Party regional annual meetings always include at least one representative from the N.E.C. to put forward party policy.

Labour Party regional annual meetings also deal with a wide range of business. The 1970 agenda of the North West Regional Council indicates the type of business which is transacted:

1. Chairman's Address.
2. Appointment of Tellers and Scrutineers.
3. Report of Regional Executive Committee.
4. Auditor's Report.
5. Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet.
6. Appointment of Auditors (two).
7. Address by N.E.C. representatives.
8. Resolutions and Amendments. (1)

In the Labour Party, however, there is greater opportunity for discussion by delegates. The formal business is dealt with rapidly, in order to give maximum time to resolutions and amendments submitted for discussion by affiliated organisations. In 1971, for example, both the West Midlands and the North West had two-day annual meetings at which most time was devoted to discussion. The smaller East Midlands region retained a one-day conference since both the routine work and the resolutions could be adequately dealt with in one day.

Each Labour Party regional annual meeting elects an executive committee to take care of the routine administrative work of the democratic regional structure. In 1969/70 the North West Regional Executive Committee met nine times, as against six in both the East and West Midlands. Labour Party regional executive committee meetings are formal occasions.

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1. 1970 North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.3.

consisting of reports from the various regional sub-committees and working parties. The minutes of the West Midlands Regional Executive Committee Meeting held on 7th December 1968 illustrate the limited range of matters at this level:

Minutes

Minutes of meeting held on 21st September 1968 and special meeting held on 26th October were signed as a correct record.

Oxfordshire

Mr. Watts reported on meeting he had attended at Henel Hempstead together with the Chairman and Secretary when the future of the organising region of the Northern Home Counties had been discussed.

It was unanimously agreed to record appreciation of services of Mr. Frank Barrington-Ward who had represented Oxfordshire on the West Midlands Regional Executive Committee in recent years.

Reports

Reports were received as follows:-

Trade Union and Transport	- Mr. F. Watts.
Local Government & Planning	- Mr. J. Garwell
Organisation and Propaganda	- Mr. E. Prendergast.
Young Socialists	- Mr. W.V. Burley.
Women's Organisations	- Miss L.C. Moody.
Parliamentary Group	- Mr. J. Horner, M.P.

Special thanks were accorded to Mr. Horner, M.P., who has recently been appointed by the Parliamentary Group as their representative on the Regional Executive Committee.

It was agreed to raise with the Parliamentary Group a suggestion that consultations be arranged in the region between members of the Group and Parliamentary Candidates.

Annual Meeting 1969

Secretary reported that the A.E.F. Hall, Birmingham, had been booked for the 1969 Annual Meeting already arranged for Sunday, 18th May 1969.

Date of Next Meeting:

It was agreed the next meeting of the Regional Executive Committee and Sub-Committees be held on Saturday, 22nd February 1969.(1)

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1. West Midlands Regional Council, Executive Committee Minutes, 7th December 1968.

A similar range of issues is dealt with by Conservative Party area executive committees, as the following example from West Midlands area indicates:

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks.
2. To Receive Apologies for Absence.
3. To Approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th February, 1972.
4. To consider Matters Arising.
5. To Receive a Report on the 1972 Quotas.
6. To Recommend the name of one Representative to serve on the National Union Central Council.
7. To Recommend the election of four Representatives to the Executive Committee of the National Union.
8. To Appoint four Representatives to serve on the Area Local Government Advisory Committee.
9. To make recommendations regarding the Election of Honorary Vice-Presidents and Honorary Members.
10. To set up a Sub-Committee to consider Notices of Motion for the Party Conference.
11. To Receive a Report on the 1972 Local Government Elections.
12. To Agree the venue for the 1973 Area Weekend Conference.
13. To Agree the dates and places of future Meetings.
14. To Consider any other business. (1)

Labour Party regional executive sub-committees have not proved very successful and, except in the North West, there has been little interest in work at this level. All too often deliberations have tended to be rushed, with insufficient time allowed for each sub-committee. In the West Midlands, for example, the executive committee has traditionally met five times a year. During the 1960's all sub-committees met on the same day. A typical programme was as follows:

Education Sub-Committee	10.30 a.m.
Local Government Sub-Committee	10.30 a.m.
Organisation and Propaganda	11.30 a.m.
Lunch	12.00 noon
Trade Union Sub-Committee	2.00 p.m.
Regional Executive Committee	2.30 p.m. (2)

1. West Midlands Area Council. Executive Committee Minutes, 20th May 1972.
2. West Midlands Regional Council Executive Committee Minutes, 1968-9.

This system was nonsensical. Able trade union leaders wasted their time enacting a meaningless facade. Instead of formal sub-committees, regional working parties are now established as and when the need arises. In 1970 the West Midlands region had four working parties functioning:

- (a) A Regional Council Working Party set up in 1968 to study the report of the Royal Commission on Local Government.
- (b) A Health Service Working Party.
- (c) An Education Working Party.
- (d) A Housing Working Party.

In the West Midlands region a similar working party on Local Government re-organisation reported to the 1970 annual conference. The North West region, however, has clung to traditional procedure. In 1970 it had four sub-committees: Organisation and Education, Local Government, Magisterial, Young Socialists.

In the Conservative Party, the level of interest in democratic area organisation varies markedly. Remote constituencies tend not to participate in area activities. In addition, when occupied with local government work, party members often give little time to the area; when out of local government office they frequently devote more time to area matters.

The level of activity of the democratic area structure can be illustrated with reference to the North West during 1969-1970.(1)

The area council held an A.G.M. and a half-yearly meeting.
The executive council met twice.
The Finance and General Purposes Committee met seven times.
The Area Women's advisory committee met eight times.
The Local Government advisory committee met three times.

1. Information from the North West Area Annual Report, 1969-1970.

The C.F.C. advisory committee met five times.
 The area advisory committee on education met five times.
 The area Young Conservatives executive committee met six times.
 The trade union advisory committee met five times.
 The Conservative clubs advisory committee met ten times.

There is competition for places on area council executive committees. In the West Midlands, for example, the position in 1968 and 1969 was as follows.(1)

TABLE 7.1

Competition for places on the West Midlands Area Council

Executive Committee, 1968, 1969

1968 for	5 men	19 nominations
	5 Trade Unionists	6 "
	5 Women	11 "
	5 Young Conservatives	8 "
1969 for	5 men	16 nominations
	5 Trade Unionists	4 "
	5 Women	11 "
	5 Young Conservatives	5 "

According to one area agent, "The people who sit on the area executive committee are not dynamic. They do it because they think prestige is involved".(2) Through the area structure an ambitious person, such as an aspiring Parliamentary candidate, can meet a large number of influential people. It seems that the area executive is more of a social than a political group, since most work at this level appears to be done, not by the elected element, but by the Central Office area agents who service the committee and its various sub-committees.

In the Labour Party competition for places on regional executive committees is greatest in the North West. Table 7.2 analyses the position in 1970.(3)

1. Taken from nomination papers, West Midlands Conservative Council, 1968, 1969.
2. J. Galloway, interview, 9.12.69.
3. Information obtained from the respective Annual Reports for 1970.

TABLE 7.2

Competition for places on Regional Executive Committees, 1970

1. North West

Trade Union Section (14 seats)	- 16 nominations
Lancashire Constituency and Central Labour Parties (8 seats)	- 16 "
Cheshire Constituency and Central Labour Parties (3 seats)	- 3 "
Women's Advisory Council (3 seats)	- 5 "
Other Organisations (2 seats)	- 2 "
Parliamentary Labour Party (2 seats)	- 2 "
Federations of Trades Councils (1 seat)	- no "

2. West Midlands

Trade Union Section (14 seats)	- 13 nominations
Constituency and Central Labour Parties (10 seats)	- 10 "
Parliamentary Labour Party (1 seat)	- 1 "
Co-operative Society (1 seat)	- 1 "
Trades Councils (1 seat)	- no "
Socialist Societies (1 seat)	- no "
Young Socialists (2 seats)	- 3 "
Women's Councils (4 seats)	- 1 "

3. East Midlands

Trade Union Section (14 seats)	- 12 nominations
Constituency and Borough Labour Parties (12 seats)	- 13 "
Co-operative Party (1 seat)	- 1 "
Women's Councils (4 seats)	- 10 "
Trades Councils (1 seat)	- 1 "
Parliamentary Labour Group (1 seat)	- 1 "

The majority of resolutions submitted for discussion at a Labour Party regional annual meeting come from constituency parties. Trade union delegates usually come into action only when there is something directly affecting their particular interests. For example, the National Union of Railwaymen was particularly active during the nationalisation of British Rail instituted by Lord Beeching early in the 1960's. The contraction of the mining industry in the late 1960's drew a similar response from the National Union of Mineworkers. Numbers of resolutions vary from region to region. The following table analyses the three regions under discussion in 1969 and 1970.

TABLE 7.3

Numbers of resolutions submitted to regional council annual meetings, 1969, 1970

North West Region

1969 - 40 resolutions

1970 - 27 resolutions

East Midlands Region

1969 - 23 resolutions

1970 - 33 resolutions

East Midlands Region

1969 - 15 resolutions

1970 - 13 resolutions

The numbers of resolutions and amendments submitted for discussion is one barometer of interest in the democratic regional structure. The precise number in any one year, however, is dependent on broader political considerations, such as the state of the party and the proximity of a General Election. There has, however, been a limiting factor on the usefulness of regional annual conferences, namely the ruling that discussion must be limited to regional matters. There could, until 1971, be no discussion of broader national issues. Over the years this limitation has provoked strong reaction from a variety of quarters. George Brown highlighted many of the grievances at the 1968 Annual Party Conference: "At every regional conference I go to I am struck by the irrelevance of much that goes on there; I am struck by the sense of frustration which the delegates have who come there... I do not see any reason why regional conferences... should not spend a good deal of their time talking about these major issues instead of the seemingly endless resolutions that never get anywhere or see the light of day, once they have been nagged about".(1) The reformers' major concern seems to have been to increase the standing of the Labour Party's regional conferences.

1. 1968 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, p.196.

By 1971 the N.E.C. decided to sail with the wind when it put before the party conference a proposed constitutional amendment lifting the ban on the discussion of national issues at regional conferences. This was accepted and put the Labour Party in line with Conservative practice, although in many respects the distinction is rather academic, since it is the exception, rather than the rule, for any notices of motion to be discussed at Conservative area council annual meetings. At the 1970 West Midlands area annual meeting, for example, there was only one notice of motion. Debate was very brief before the standing orders were brought into effect and the meeting declared closed. Labour Party regional conferences are more concerned with debate and discussion than their Conservative counterparts. Conservative area meetings are essentially formal occasions at which the required business is hurriedly completed before the meeting draws to a close. One could argue that this merely reflects different notions within the two parties concerning discussion: one party encouraging debate; the other discouraging it.

The West Midlands Conservative Area Agent asserted that he was "not at all enthusiastic about area committees. The only useful ones are the Women's Advisory Committee, the Young Conservatives Advisory Committee and, to a lesser extent, the E.P.C. Advisory Committee. The rest of them do not do much, but on the other hand they are not doing much harm, and if they keep talking long enough they might come up with something useful. They are vested interests for people, but the national party structure needs such units at area level, therefore they remain".(1)

1. P. Livingston, interview, 28.5.70.

Although there is a certain inevitability about comments such as this, they are, nevertheless, important. After attending annual meetings and area committees, and after examining documentary evidence at the regional and area level, the author's overriding impression was that the democratic element in both parties was heavily dependent on the professionals. Committees at the regional and area level have some use. They help to organise conferences, often suggesting possible topics. They also deal with some formal administrative matters. Most organisational initiatives are, however, taken by the professional bureaucrats in each party.

In the North West, for example, the regional organiser outlined something of the work involved in co-ordinating the voluntary side of regional organisation in 1970:

"... A Regional Organiser is Secretary to the Regional Council. In this capacity, particularly in a Region like the North West, he does, in fact, carry out a great deal of work. At the moment, I am engaged in two operations: - (a) I am now attempting to co-ordinate the activities of the Labour members of the new Passenger Transport Authorities (S.E.I.D.N.E.C. and Merseyside). I am also engaged in consultations with the various Labour Groups in an attempt to give the P.T.A. more public backing. (b) Now that the Tory Government has declared itself against development areas, I am collating information and trying to co-ordinate the activities of organisations influenced by the Labour Party in an attempt to try and bring about a change in the attitude of the present Government. If it carried out the proposals already announced, the area of Merseyside would suffer greatly and the future of Barrow and district would be very bleak."(1)

The contrast with the smaller East Midlands Region is marked. The following extract indicates the relatively small amount of work involved in co-ordinating the efforts of the democratic organisation in the East Midlands:

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1. M. Carnody, North West Regional Organiser, letter to the author, 29.10.70.

"The work of the East Midlands Regional Council absorbs very little of the time of either the organising or the administrative staff in the office. The Regional Council has no standing committees. The full Executive Committee meets five times a year and any special sub-committees it appoints usually meet on Saturday mornings prior to the Executive Committee meetings in the afternoon. There is, of course, the Annual Conference and this involves two meetings of the Standing Orders Committee which, because of the time-table laid down in the Standing Orders, have to be held on weekdays. At the Annual Conference itself, however, a statement of policy is always made by a member of the National Executive Committee - when we are in Government often by a senior member of the Government. The time taken compiling the minutes and the annual report is very small but, in any case, the annual report contains information about educational conferences, selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates, agencies, local government election results, Parliamentary by-elections and Parliamentary and local government re-organisation, all of which are matters of concern to the National Executive Committee of the Party." (1)

Conservative Party area agents always act as honorary secretary to their area council and area executive committee. They both service and co-ordinate the activities of these committees and the various sub-committees at the area level. They convene the yearly and half-yearly meetings of the area council (the East Midlands Area does not have a half-yearly meeting, only an annual meeting). In addition, the sub-committees are provided with information by the permanent staff at area office.

Area agents and regional organisers are also involved in maintaining contacts with Members of Parliament from their area. The 1970 North West Regional Council Annual Report observed: "Close contact has been maintained with the Parliamentary Labour Group. The Regional Secretary has attended a

1. East Midlands Regional Organiser, Evidence presented to the Simpson Committee on Party Organisation, 1968.

number of Group Meetings at the House of Commons, Mr. H. Ogden, M.P., and Mr. T. Price, M.P., have served as Parliamentary group representatives on the Regional Executive Committee."(1) On several occasions each year the regional organiser attends group meetings and addresses the group on matters of regional importance. For example, the East Midlands Group of the Labour Party commented in the 1970 Annual Report:

"The Group has maintained regular liaison with the Regional Council through its Regional Organiser Mr. Jim Cattermole, and at a recent meeting Members were fully acquainted with the recommendations of the Regional Executive Committee Working Party on the Redcliffe-Maud proposals for the re-organisation of Local Government. We are also indebted to Mr. Michael English, M.P., our representative on the Regional Executive Committee for keeping the Group informed of the activities of the Council."(2)

Regional organisers are able to provide an overall perspective which M.P.'s may find useful in their group discussions. On 30th March 1969, for example, following the recommendations of the Hunt Committee, the East Midlands Regional Organiser met the Members of Parliament for the East Midlands whose constituencies bordered the Erwash Valley. The regional organiser contributed to the discussion about the future of this declining mining area.

Likewise, in the Conservative Party, there is liaison between area office and the area's Members of Parliament. Each M.P. is automatically a member of his area council. In the North West M.P.'s are also members of the area executive committee. There is, however, no provision for M.P.'s on the area business committee, the finance and general purposes

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1. 1970 North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.9.
 2. 1970 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.13.

committee.(1) The East Midlands Area rules allow one co-opted M.P. to sit on the executive committee.(2) In the West Midlands there is no specific provision for representation of M.P.s at the executive committee level. As in the Labour Party, formal liaison coexists with informal visits to the House of Commons for discussion on matters of mutual concern.

The Lancashire Plot

The initiatives at the regional and area level appear to be taken almost always by the party organisers. There are, however, undoubtedly exceptions to this generalisation. The outbreak of militant activity in the Lancashire and Cheshire area in 1923 is one such instance. This illustrates the way in which the Conservative Party's area organisation can spring into activity when a region's interests appear threatened by national party policy. In Lancashire the area structure provided a channel through which regional discontent with the government could be registered.

After the Conservative Party's defeat in the 1923 election, Herman Salvidge, a Conservative Party leader in Liverpool, recorded in his diary: "The election results were appalling everywhere but nowhere worse than in Lancashire... Interviewed by London papers a few days after the disaster, I said that those who were responsible for this rushed election might just as well have rolled tons of dynamite into Liverpool to uproot the Conservative Party...."(3)

1. North West Provincial Area, Rules and Constitution.

2. Rules of the East Midlands Area Council.

3. H Salvidge, Salvidge of Liverpool, London, 1934, p.266.

Salvidge and Lord Derby proceeded to mobilise the resentment of their local associations against both the protection issue and the timing of the 1923 election. A special meeting of the Lancashire and Cheshire Area Council was called at Manchester on 9th February to discuss the political situation. The attendance, usually about two or three hundred, was on this occasion nearly a thousand. Colonel Jackson (the Chairman of the Party Organisation) and Admiral Hall (the Principal Agent) came up from London to put the case for Central Office. The chair was taken by Lord Derby who, according to Alderman Salvidge, was "eager for Lancashire to make its voice heard but anxious that the party managers should not be unduly embarrassed". To the latter end the press was excluded, but after the meeting Lord Derby made an official statement in which he described the proceedings.⁽¹⁾ Colonel Buckley, a Conservative Free Trader, had moved a resolution which would have placed on record "the dissatisfaction (of the meeting) with the policy of the Conservative Party in forcing an election on the issue of Protection", and urging that "Protection should be definitely abandoned as a plank in the policy of the party". This resolution was seconded by one M.P. and supported by another. Then Alderman Salvidge moved an amendment:

"That this meeting... believing that the verdict of the country at the recent election was against a change in the fiscal system, respectfully represents to the leaders of the party that it is undesirable that Protection should be included in the programme of the Conservative policy at this juncture. Further, it respectfully protests against the methods adopted previous to the recent General Election when an appeal was made to the

1. The excerpts from the report of the meeting which follow are taken from a verbatim account of Lord Derby's statement in Gleanings and Memoranda, March 1924, pp.242-3. See also R.S. Churchill, Lord Derby, King of Lancashire, London, 1959.

electors on the issue of protection without affording the party organisations throughout the country an opportunity of expressing their opinions thereon; and urges that, with a view to securing in the future greater harmony and better to obtain the representative opinion of the party, a satisfactory method of liaison be established between the leaders of the party, the Central Office, and the local organisations.' (1)

Colonel Jackson intervened for Central Office and apparently tried to 'head the delegates off from expressing a definite opinion on policy'. (2) But his advice was ignored; Salvidge's motion was carried, according to Lord Derby's statement, "by an overwhelming majority".

In this instance the area structure provided a channel through which regional discontent with national party policy could be expressed, although there was "no thought of disloyalty to the Head Office... and the main thought pervading the meeting was to restore the feeling of mutual confidence and to arrive at the best methods of giving expression to the principles for which they stood and from which they had never wavered". (3) The area structure enabled Lancashire to register a firm protest against Baldwin's protectionist policy.

The Conservative Party's area structure has never been used quite so dramatically in subsequent years, but its potential, given dynamic leadership, was demonstrated in 1923. In the more limited life of the Labour Party there has not been any challenge to the party leadership through regional activity. No doubt this is partly because of the long-standing limitation on discussion at the regional level, which was only lifted by

1. Cleanings and Memoranda, 1924, pp.242-243.
2. J. Salvidge, Salvidge of Liverpool, London, 1934, p.266.
3. R.T. McKenzie, British Political Parties, London, 1967, p.240, quote from an interview with Lord Derby in The Morning Post.

the N.E.C. in 1971. There have, of course, been resolutions passed at regional conferences which have been critical of party policy, but these are treated as any other resolutions. In the Labour Party discontent with the leadership is usually expressed through resolutions, but on an issue of wide regional significance the type of protest engineered by Derby and slivage in the North West cannot be ruled out.

The democratic organisation at the regional and area level provides a channel through which the party leadership may be made aware of the feelings of the rank and file. It is infrequently used, but potentially is important. In addition, through the conferences organised at the regional and area level, often under the auspices of the democratic wing, party policies can be conveyed from the leadership to the rank and file. In the North West in 1969/1970, for example, 54 meetings, organised under area auspices, were addressed by Conservative shadow Ministers.(1) In the Labour Party in the same year there were 28 conferences in the North West Region addressed by government ministers on Local Government, Government Policy, National Superannuation, Overseas Aid, and Future Policy.(2) The democratic structure at the regional and area level has a role to play in the communication of opinion from the leadership down to the grass roots. While these conferences are frequently organised under area council auspices, much of the work involved in staging them appears to be carried out by the professionals at this organisational level.

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1. 1970 Annual Report of the North West Provincial Area, p.12.
 2. 1970 Annual Report, North West Regional Council of the Labour Party, pp.7,8.

Astute Leadership

Normally, an area chairman has a very important role to play in party work at the area level. The official Central Office handbook, The Party Organisation, outlines his role in the following way:

1. He is the elected leader of the voluntary organisation of the party.
2. He presides at meetings of the Provincial Area Council and Executive Committee, and endeavours to ensure that their conclusions are representative of the view of the Party as a whole throughout the area.
3. He interprets such views to the Executive Committee of the National Union, and to the Chairman of the Party Organisation whenever opportunities for consultation arise.
4. He should, if possible, be personally acquainted with constituency officers and agents in order to be able to appreciate their problems.
5. He should be available to advise the Central Office on problems concerning the area as a whole, and to lend his influence where it is required to deal with difficult problems in constituencies.
6. He lends his support and influence to the encouragement of constituency activities in connection with national schemes for the advancement of the Party; e.g. national membership campaigns, speaking competitions, cinema propaganda, schemes for the training of canvassers.
7. He encourages and fosters the development of specialised Party activities within the Area in conjunction with Local Government Elections, political education, Conservative Trade Unionists, Teachers' Associations, etc.
8. He tries to ensure that the recommendations of Party Headquarters in respect of organisation are put into effect in the constituencies.
9. He advises the Standing Advisory Committee on Parliamentary Candidates when requested in particularly difficult cases.
10. In consultation with the Area Honorary Treasurer he assists the Area representative of the Board of Finance in their relationship with constituencies, encourage the raising of the constituency quote for the Central activities of the Party, and keeps the Treasurers of the Party in touch with the Area's financial needs.(1)

1. The Party Organisation, op.cit., pp.19,20.

The Final Report of the Committee on Party Organisation (1949) recognised that, given the wide range of duties outlined above, the area chairman needed to "be a man of outstanding energy, distinction and tact". Proposing a maximum tenure of office of five years, the report asserted: "He could then hope to make himself familiar with the working of the area and ensure continuity of policy. There may well be fifty to eighty different constituencies in his area, each one of which has its own Conservative Association and Constituency office. He should know personally all the Constituency Chairmen, Treasurers and agents". The report did, however, recognise that it would be difficult to find "twelve such men or women - outstanding personalities who are able and willing to devote to the activities of the office of Area Chairman + a large proportion of their time".(1) Attending constituency association annual meetings, and the meetings of the Party Executive Committee and General Purposes Committee in London, dealing with area executive committee matters and chairing the area executive committee meetings are all very time-consuming commitments. The work, therefore, precludes attempts by a wage-earner to become area chairman. Normally area chairmen are drawn from leaders in industry, people with time available to give to a job so demanding when executed at its best.

Professor J. Blondel has examined the background of the forty-three people who held the post of chairman in the twelve areas during the period 1952-62. Of these, twenty-nine appeared in Who's Who, "twelve perhaps because they were M.P.s, but seventeen on account of their social prestige only". Blondel observed "This never happens for the prospective holders of

1. Final report of the committee on Party Organisation, pp.22,23.

the office on the Labour side".(1) In the Conservative Party "of the twenty-seven (area chairmen) whose education could be traced, twenty-two had been to public school and twenty had been to universities or equivalent places of higher education, nine had been to Oxbridge and five to one of the service colleges... Of the twenty-eight Chairmen whose occupation could be traced, thirteen were in business, in most cases big business; seven had been in the professions, five in the services and three in the Civil Service or another public body".(2) The upper middle class nature of the leadership at area level is unmistakable. The nature of the work, coupled with the social pyramid within the Conservative Party, means that there is no place for the wage-earner in the top ranks of the area structure.

A Conservative Party area chairman is more than a figure-head. In 1971 no area had an M.P. as chairman. This was partly a recognition of the fact that an M.P. does not have time to do the job effectively. It was also widely felt that M.P.s had their own platform in the House of Commons and it was unhealthy from the standpoint of democratisation within the Conservative Party, for all important positions to be held by M.P.s. Despite the formal outline described previously, the work of an area chairman varies enormously, depending on the interest of the chairman in question. Goodwill visits to constituencies are time-consuming and many area chairmen do not manage to fit them into their programme. There is, of course, a danger that an area chairman will present a false picture to

1. J. Blondel, Voters, Parties and Leaders. London, 1963, p.109.

2. J. Blondel, *op.cit.*, p.109

the National Executive Committee or the General Purposes Committee through not having visited more than one or two constituencies during the previous month. The Chairman of the Party, however, has other means of determining opinion in the country, and the area chairman nevertheless remains an important link between the Party in the country and the leadership in Parliament. Their counterparts on the Labour side have no such role to play.

In the Labour Party, regional council chairmen have little importance. In the East and West Midlands the position is rotated annually on the basis of seniority. It is purely a sinecure, a reward offered for loyal service at the regional level. In the North West, however, there is a different system in operation and between 1938 and 1971 there were only four regional council chairmen. In the Labour Party a chairman tends not to be a figure of importance; a secretary usually assumes the responsibilities and duties which, in the Conservative Party, are often undertaken by the chairman. H.R. Underhill, Assistant National Agent of the Labour Party in 1970, observed that the "regional council chairman is not important. You use him". If the press wants a statement the regional chairman is frequently called upon. Underhill added "You never let the chairman go round the constituencies and interfere".(1) In the Labour Party the regional chairman is usually an ordinary constituency worker or trade union official (or, occasionally, an M.P.) who has frequently earned the position by virtue of seniority. His responsibilities appear to be minimal.

1. H.R. Underhill, interview, 27.1.70.

Summary

The Lancashire Plot illustrated how the area structure could be used for overtly political ends.(1)

Both parties have retained elaborate democratic structures at the regional level. There are executive committees, sub-committees and working parties. There are annual conferences, discussions on resolutions, and delegations to central government. There are key political personnel elected at the area level, notably the area chairmen. Essentially, however, one cannot avoid concluding that the democratically elected personnel at the area and regional levels are basically laymen, often unacquainted with the techniques of party organisation. It is up to the regional and area staff to inject the organisational initiatives. The democratically elected element at the regional and area level does contribute to discussion about policy and organisation, but invariably the initiatives appear to be taken by the professionals in each party.

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1. While completing the thesis, another example occurred of the area structure being used for overtly political ends. Mr. Enoch Powell was at the centre of the controversy. In 1972 the West Midlands Area Executive Council nominated Sir Tatton Brinton as President of the area in succession to Sir Hugh Fraser, who retired after five years in office. Usually presidents are elected unopposed, emerging from behind the scenes. In 1972, however, Enoch Powell was also nominated as President for what were apparently overtly political reasons. To quote the West Midlands Area Agent, "Powell stood simply to get a stab at Heath". (J. Galloway, interview, 1.11.72.) According to The Birmingham Post, Brinton triumphed over Powell by a 4:3 vote with over 400 constituency representatives attending. (The Birmingham Post, May 22nd, 1972). As in 1923, the area structure demonstrated its potential to locally-based politicians. In 1972, however, Enoch Powell was defeated in his apparent attempt to undermine the Conservative Party leadership.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A CASE STUDY: THE 1970 GENERAL ELECTION

Introduction

The announcement of a General Election heralds a period of intense activity at the regional and area level. Election campaigns are particularly demanding for Labour Party regional staff, given the inadequacies of constituency organisation. This necessitates greater regional involvement at the constituency level than is required in the Conservative Party where there is a more professional organisation. The professionalism which characterises Conservative Party constituency organisation helps to account for the different roles played by regional organisers and area agents during a General Election campaign.

While only 23% of constituencies had a full time Labour agent in 1970, the Conservative figure was almost three times as high. In the Conservative Party some 62% of constituencies were serviced by a professional agent during the General Election campaign. With their constituency associations relatively well endowed with organisational expertise, Conservative Party area agents were free to concentrate on intelligence work, the transfer of workers from safe to marginal constituencies, and advising candidates on aspects of party policy. Labour Party regional organisers were too deeply committed with administrative detail at the constituency level to allow themselves anything other than a passing interest in intelligence work, mutual aid, and questions on party policy.

Despite the differences in emphasis outlined above, both regional organisers and area agents invariably deal with the following matters during a General Election campaign:

- a) The selection of any outstanding Parliamentary candidates and election agents.
- b) The allocation of national speakers, supplied by the respective head offices, to critical and marginal constituencies.
- c) Arrangements for the Prime Minister's and Opposition Leader's tour in accordance with the national strategy.
- d) Intelligence work, linking head office with the constituencies.
- e) The provision of advice on legal, organisational, publicity and policy matters to election agents and candidates.
- f) Press and television work.
- g) The initiation and co-ordination of mutual aid within the region or area.

The Labour Party

The Prime Minister's announcement, on May 18th 1970, that a General Election was to be held in June caught most people off their guard. The Labour Party's organising staff was no exception. Nevertheless, certain preparations had been made. Between January and May 1970 the National Agent and his two assistants visited 137 constituency parties, spending time with key officers and explaining their responsibilities during the next General Election.

Regional organisers had also engaged in some preparatory work. In the North West, for example,

"During the months of October and November, (1969) the Regional Organising Staff visited every constituency to carry out a detailed survey in connection with General Election preparations. This was followed in December by residential weekend consultations for Election Agents. In March and April of this year (1970) a further series of consultations were held in key marginal seats, with a National Officer present. In the period January/April, weekend residential consultations were held for some marginal constituencies. The combined effect of this work did, in fact, bring the Party a reasonable state of readiness."(1)

1. P. Carmody, Labour Organiser. July/August 1970, p.140.

However, the use of the word "reasonable" in the above quotation implies that the organisation was poor. Certainly, very few regional organisers had anticipated a dissolution before the summer. At the time of the announcement only about a third of constituency parties had begun the massive task of writing envelopes for the election addresses. In the East Midlands "ten constituencies, in spite of appeals to them going back to August 1969, had not ordered their election envelopes. To meet their demands we (Regional Office) sent vans direct to the manufacturers, literally getting the envelopes off the machines" 1)

The East Midlands Regional Organiser asserted, early in the campaign, "We can honestly say that we were caught unprepared. It is the first time I can remember running around like this." (2) The East Midlands Region appeared particularly unprepared. When the election was announced the region still had five constituencies without a prospective Parliamentary candidate. Five selection conferences had to be organised and attended by regional staff:

West Derbyshire	on 22nd May
Louth	on 23rd May
Melton	on 29th May
Derby North	on 30th May
Leicester N.W.	on 31st May.

The West Midlands and North West regional staff each had one selection conference to deal with: Lichfield and Tamworth in the West Midlands, and Rossendale in the North West.

The shortage of election agents posed problems for regional organisers. Along with the adoption of candidates, the selection of agents was a major priority. In the East Midlands

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1. J. Cattermole, Labour Organiser, July/August, 1970, p.141.
 2. J. Cattermole, interview, 2.6.70.

"Three constituencies were without agents and people had to be dragged at the last moment to fill those jobs."(1) D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky have summarised the position at the outset of the campaign:

"In most parts of the country Labour had still to recruit amateur agents and there were even candidates to be chosen. Regional organisers were therefore involved in a disproportionate amount of work in setting up the constituency campaigns. Assistant regional organisers had to spend a great deal of time, especially in the first two weeks of the campaign, giving elementary advice to volunteer agents. They helped them to obtain temporary telephones or premises, to fill in nomination forms, to design election addresses, to understand the technicalities of the law and much more. All agents received daily sheets from the National Agent offering legal and organisational guidance, but the less experienced still required direct help from the regional office."(2)

During the campaign much of the work connected with the allocation of speakers was dealt with at the regional level. In the first few days of the campaign Front Bench speakers provided a list of available dates to the Speakers Department at Transport House which then allocated a minister to a region for a given period. The regional organiser then decided, faced with priorities, which marginal constituencies most needed a national speaker; he then made the necessary administrative arrangements. Very often regional office even undertook to book halls and arrange publicity for the meetings, especially when there was an inexperienced or hard-pressed election agent working in the constituency. This, however, has always been a regional organiser's task. In 1950, for example:

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1. J. Cattermole, Labour Organiser, op.cit., p.141.
 2. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, The British General Election of 1970, London, 1971, pp.306 and 307.

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"The Regional Office arranged speakers for 170 meetings, the majority being national speakers allocated by Head Office. As far as possible these speakers were allocated marginal and rural constituencies as well as areas of major electoral importance."(1)

Similarly, in 1951:

"In accordance with usual practice national speakers were allocated to Regional Office and every effort was made to use the services of the speakers in the constituencies where they would be the greatest assistance to the Party".(2)

In the 1970 General Election campaign there were fewer meetings than there had been in 1966. In the East Midlands, for instance, only 44 meetings were arranged by Regional Office compared with 95 in 1966.(3) The regional organiser, or one of his assistants, was detailed to meet all national speakers as they entered his region. He had to book hotels, order meals, inform the police and pay certain bills en route. The overall tour programme in 1970 was determined nationally; the regional organiser was required to attend to details which could be handled most conveniently locally.

Halls for national speakers were frequently booked by regional office, but occasionally the organiser delegated this work to the local election agent. On 11th June George Brown spoke in Coventry as part of his national tour schedule. The West Midlands Regional Office not only booked the hall, but also dealt with publicity for the meeting, in order to allow the hard-pressed election agent for Coventry South to remain free from administrative detail.(4) Yet for George Brown's meeting

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1. 1950 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.6.
 2. 1952 Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council Annual Report, p.9.
 3. J. Cattermole, interview, 17.6.70.
 4. G. Daly, Election Agent for Coventry South, interview, 29.5.70.

in Dudley. regional office gave the local agent the task of booking a hall. He booked a school hall for the meeting but, on instructions from regional office, changed the venue to Dudley Town Hall.

An unusual example of the detailed work with which a regional organiser has to be concerned occurred in the 1970 General Election campaign. Robert Mellish, Minister of Housing, while in the East Midlands Region, was scheduled to appear on television on 2nd June. At lunch time the regional organiser asked him if he wanted a clean shirt for the occasion. He did, so the regional organiser had to go out and buy one.

The 1950 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report stated: "Arrangements for the (Prime Minister's) tour within the Region were made by the Regional Office in conjunction with local organisers."(1) In dealing with the arrangements for a Prime Ministerial tour the overall administrative relationship between Transport House and regional office is seen in its true perspective. Regional organisers act as field agents for the head office, attending to detail which, if dealt with centrally, would cause bottlenecks at Transport House.

At the outset of the 1970 campaign regional organisers were directed by the Organisation Department at Transport House to book halls for the Prime Minister's formal meetings, but early plans were changed by the Prime Minister who soon adopted a more informal electioneering technique. Each regional office was, therefore, directed to draw up a different programme in accordance with the new Transport House specifications. In response

1. 1950 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.6.

to this new directive the East Midlands Regional Organiser sent a draft itinerary to Transport House for approval. After four days Cattermole had not received a reply so he telephoned John Taylor at the Speakers Department at Transport House. Together they spent over an hour planning the Prime Minister's final route and dealing with related administrative matters. This new plan then had to be revised on receipt of the news from Transport House that the Prime Minister wanted to visit two sub-committee rooms instead of one central committee room in Nottingham. On 3rd June Cattermole spent all day dealing with tour arrangements. The agent for Nottingham South and West went to regional office to help determine the route to be taken through the city. These arrangements were ultimately accepted by Transport House. All told, the regional organiser spent many hours producing a route, determining exactly when the Prime Minister would arrive at committee rooms, hiring cars to carry the Prime Minister from the station and checking with hotels about numbers for meals. This, and a wide range of related detail, was the exclusive province of regional office staff in 1970.

Regional office frequently acted as a link between Transport House and constituencies. For example, early on the morning of 4th June each regional organiser was telephoned by head office and told to contact all central committee rooms and instruct candidates not to comment on the attack on Powellism made the previous evening by Anthony Wedgewood-Benn. (The Prime Minister made a statement later in the day). On another occasion there was an urgent directive from the National Agent asking regional organisers to instruct candidates to remain inside committee rooms during the Prime Minister's tour because

the Party was losing television time, since if one candidate was shown the television network was obliged to provide coverage for his opponent.

The following two examples emphasise the extent of the role played by regional organisers in linking Transport House with constituencies. At the outset of the 1970 campaign the General Secretary sent out a questionnaire to each constituency party enquiring about its financial requirements. While the questionnaire was sent direct from Transport House to the constituency parties, the completed document had to be returned to the regional organiser: "This is so you (the regional organiser) may check the information supplied and, on the basis of your personal knowledge of the financial position of the constituency and its needs, so that you can make a recommendation about the size of the grant that you think is necessary." The letter continued: "Please return each completed questionnaire to the National Agent with your recommendation as soon as possible."(1)

On 1st June regional organisers were asked by the General Secretary to determine how many constituencies in each region required copies of election literature printed in the four languages, Bengali, Urdu, Gujarati and Hindi:

"Head Office will make the leaflet available, free of charge, to any constituency who requires it, and we should be grateful if you would ascertain from the constituencies in your region, how many leaflets they will require, and specify very clearly the quantities for each language that they require.

"Will you please take immediate action on this matter, as time does not allow us to circulate every constituency, and therefore you will appreciate that arrangements must be made by telephone with the constituencies in your area, to which this is applicable."(2)

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1. Letter from H.R. Nicholas to regional organisers, 18th May 1970.
 2. Letter from H.R. Nicholas to regional organisers, 1st June 1970.

Contact between Transport House and the regional offices was close throughout the campaign. Almost immediately the National Agent wrote to all regional organisers giving details of when Transport House would be open during the campaign, outlining rates of pay for clerical staff, and also stating that, during the campaign, there would be no need for organisers to submit reports of every visit made. The National Agent stated that individual reports were only necessary in exceptional cases. If this note implied less detailed accountability than during a non-election period, it is important to remember that during the campaign there was very close telephone contact between Transport House and the regions. Hayward telephoned the regions daily, and most regional organisers telephoned Transport House several times each day. This provided a more useful network of communications than is possible through the use of the short reports submitted by regional staff during non-election periods.

Directives went out from Transport House at regular intervals throughout the campaign. On 29th May, for example, the National Agent sent the following letter to all regional organising staff:

"Dear Colleague,

Nomination of Candidates

The most important task now is to ensure that all our candidates are successfully nominated. As you will know the last day for nomination is Monday next 8th June.

Every effort should be made to ensure that all candidates get their nomination papers handed in this week so that they may be checked.

I enclose a correct form of Nomination Paper so that you can check any nominations before they are handed in. Please make absolutely certain that our candidates are using this new form.

I would be grateful if you would let me know as soon as each candidate is successfully nominated..." (1)

1. Letter from Ron Hayward, National Agent, to regional organising staff, 29th May 1970.

In the 1970 General Election regional organisers were involved in detailed work at the constituency level, due to the shortage of full-time agents. However, 1970 was not unique. Referring to the 1945 General Election, the West Midlands Regional Organiser observed: "As was expected a great deal of the burden of direction and planning of the General Election campaign devolved upon the Regional Council and Office. The West Midlands Region, like other areas, found that most of the comrades appointed as Agents for the Campaign had little or no previous experience. We only had full-time Agents in seven constituencies, and in addition, we were without a full-time officer in the key centre of Birmingham."(1) In 1955 there were only 17 full-time election agents in the West Midlands, four of whom were acting for the first time. 27 other election agents were conducting their first campaigns. No less than 36 constituencies had a different election agent than in 1951.(2) At the 1959 General Election 30 out of the 54 election agents were in charge of their first campaign. 37 constituencies had a different election agent than in 1955. 18 constituencies had full-time agents, 8 acting for the first time.(3) In the North West in 1950 there were 32 full-time and 49 voluntary agents manning the area.(4) By 1970 the position had deteriorated and there were fewer full-time agents than there had been for many years. Only 17%, 28% and 15% of constituencies in the North West, East Midlands and West Midlands, respectively, were serviced by a full-time agent during the election. Regional

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1. 1946 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.8.
 2. 1956 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.5.
 3. 1960 West Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.8.
 4. 1950 Lancashire and Cheshire Regional Council Annual Report, p.11.

organisers' concern with administrative detail at the constituency level was, therefore, through force of circumstances greater in 1970 than during any previous post-war General Election.

Constituency election agents received daily guidelines from Transport House throughout the 1970 campaign. These covered a wide range of legal and general electoral matters. In addition, however, regional organisers sent out a considerable amount of duplicated material to election agents. The East Midlands Region is examined in some detail since most information was available from this region.

On 14th May 1970, just before the General Election was announced, a letter was sent by the East Midlands Regional Organiser to constituency party secretaries providing details of nationally-produced broadsheets which "we shall be producing in the event of a General Election." The letter ended: "If you intend to have a local edition, perhaps you would let me know the name for the paper and also let me have a black and white glossy photograph of the candidate, size 10" x 8"."(1)

On 18th May the following letter was sent by regional office to constituency party secretaries:

"As you know, polling day in the General Election is Thursday, 18th June and all Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament required for meetings will be allocated from this office. I shall be glad, therefore, if you will let me know as soon as possible the dates on which you will require outside speakers. When sending your information, please let us know the name of the hall and the time of the meeting, in order to save time.

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1. Letter from East Midlands Regional Organiser to Constituency Party Secretaries, 14th May, 1970.

"We have ample stocks of election material and perhaps you could order your requirements early...

"Perhaps you would note that as from Tuesday 1st May, the office will be manned from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays.(1)

"I shall be glad if you will let me know as soon as possible the address of your committee room, the telephone number and the name of the election agent where we do not already have this. Obviously the election campaign is going to be short and sweet, and whilst I appreciate the timing has been totally unexpected, I know I can rely on you to prosecute a most effective campaign. If at any time we can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

"We have divided the region up between the three members of the organising staff and we shall be visiting you for preliminary discussion within the next week."(2)

On 21st May a further circular was sent out to the constituencies. This indicates the type of detail which regional office is concerned during a campaign:

"We would take this opportunity of bringing to your attention a number of points in connection with the General Election.

1. Committee Rooms.

We are still waiting for details of some central committee rooms and telephone numbers. Perhaps you could let us have them as soon as possible as it is holding us up in the preparation of a directory for the region which we want to circulate to all parties as soon as possible.

2. Speakers for Meetings.

Requests for speakers should be made to this office, not Transport House, and perhaps you could let me have your requests as soon as possible.

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1. Here, at the request of Transport House, the hours of opening were later extended. The office was kept open until 10 p.m. each evening and until 6 p.m. on Saturdays. The office was also manned during the whole of the Spring Bank Holidays, including Sunday, until 6 p.m. in the evening.
 2. Letter from East Midlands Regional Organiser to Constituency Party Secretaries, 18th May, 1970.

3. Office Hours.

At the request of Transport House, the office is being kept open until 10 p.m. each evening and 6 p.m. on Saturdays. The office will also be manned during the whole of the Spring Bank holiday, including Sunday, at least until 6 p.m. in the evening. Transport House will also be open for the same times.

4. Finance.

Transport House have already sent out their letter about finance, and if you have not returned your form to us, perhaps you would do this as soon as possible, as Transport House are anxious for their cheques to be issued early in the campaign. We have issued our customary General Election appeal and we shall be making grants to constituencies at the end of the campaign when parties have a complete picture of the finances of the election. We shall also be sending to some constituency parties receipted invoices for services which have been undertaken by Regional Office and to cover such items as special election appeals which might be issued by other organisations such as the Miners' manifesto, which is certain to be issued to mining constituencies in the region and which is published by the National Union of Mineworkers.

5. Election Material.

We have ample supplies of election material, but perhaps you would let us have your orders quickly and we will try and deliver them on our tours of the region.

6. Selection Meetings.

Those constituencies re-selecting their sitting Member of Parliament should remember that when completing the financial agreement on the nomination paper the Hastings Agreement (1) was amended last year and advantage should be taken of the increases approved by Conference. If you want details of this perhaps you would contact me.

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1. The 1933 Hastings Agreement governed the limits to trade union contributions for sponsored candidates. The 1969 Annual Conference approved an increase from 50% to 60% in the proportion of an agent's salary that a sponsoring union could contribute in borough constituencies, and from 55% to 65% in county constituencies.

It is not our intention to circulate you very often, only when it is absolutely essential. Please do not hesitate, however, to get in touch with us if you have any difficulties."(1)

These letters provided certain basic information, particularly useful for voluntary election agents. They also served to reassure the, often inexperienced, volunteers that regional office was always on hand to help.

While all regions concentrated upon marginal constituencies, every constituency, no matter how "safe" or "hopeless", was visited at some time during the 1970 General Election campaign. "Every Constituency was visited at least twice during the campaign and most of them were visited during the last week."(2) The rationale behind regional visits to "safe" and "hopeless" constituencies was well put by an assistant regional organiser: "We have got to live with these constituencies after the election."(3)

The following summary from the log book of an assistant regional organiser, Mrs. M. Long (East Midlands), not only provides a detailed account of the work of an organiser within his/her area, but also outlines some of the difficulties faced by regional staff in their dealings with inexperienced election agents. For convenience, the work carried out on 1st and 2nd June 1970 will be examined. The bulk of the time was spent dealing with matters in the three marginal constituencies to which Mrs. Long had been allocated by the regional organiser: Belper, Rushcliffe, and South East Derbyshire.

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1. Letter from East Midlands Regional Organiser to Election Agents, 21st May 1970.
 2. 1970 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.16.
 3. Interview with Mrs. M. Long, East Midlands Assistant Regional Organiser. 17.6.70.

1st June

9 a.m. Visit to Rushcliffe to discuss basic organisation and to persuade the election agent that he needed the services of a shorthand typist for the campaign.

2.00 p.m. Visit to the Derby North and South office. Here a volunteer had been persuaded to act as election agent at the last minute. A routine visit was necessary to reassure the agent and to provide assistance on certain administrative matters. The A.R.O. spent time checking and filling in legal forms which the election agent found difficult. The A.R.O. also checked:

- (a) that the nomination forms had been filled in correctly;
- (b) that both Derby North and South had \$150 nomination fee;
- (c) that the agent knew how this money had to be paid over, namely by bankers' order and not by cheque.

2.45 p.m. Visit to South East Derbyshire, a Labour-held marginal constituency with a voluntary election agent. Almost immediately there was a dispute with the election agent, who had altered the venue of a meeting, featuring Robert Mellish, the following day without making the new tour itinerary available to the press. The A.R.O. persuaded the agent to revert to the original plan. The election agent had not prepared an itinerary for the candidate for the following day. The A.R.O. planned this and also dealt with a wide range of other minor administrative matters.

5.30 p.m. Visit to Belper, another Labour-held marginal constituency. At Belper there was little to be done as the A.R.O. had already spent five days in the constituency during the previous week. The A.R.O. spent some time telephoning friends within the constituency in order to find accommodation for a visiting supporting speaker, Tom Skeffington-Lodge, who had volunteered his help.

7.30 p.m. Another visit to Rushcliffe. Called the constituency agent out of a public meeting to attempt, once again, to persuade him that he should employ a shorthand typist for the duration of the campaign.

2nd June

10.00 a.m. Derby Press Conference. The A.R.O. acted as chairman at a press conference which had been organised by Regional Office for local candidates and for a visiting Cabinet Minister, Robert Mellish.

11.00 a.m. South East Derbyshire. The remainder of the day was spent here. The A.R.O. spent some time dissuading the election agent from sending election

envelopes to ward parties to be filled without first checking the addresses against the electoral register. The A.R.O. emphasised that spot-checking was not sufficient. In the light of this advice the election agent reorganised the plans for filling and checking the envelopes.

Postal vote work was particularly intense in the West Midlands Region. Up until 1st June, one of the Region's A.R.O.'s, Walter Burley, spent most of his time co-ordinating postal vote work in the overspill areas of Chelmsley Wood and Telford. A large percentage of the inhabitants of these areas had only recently moved from Birmingham and were still on the electoral register for one of the Birmingham constituencies. The A.R.O. enlisted the help of a few dozen students to seek out the postal vote. Regional Office composed a letter from the candidate and provided instructions about how to vote. The West Midlands region devoted far more effort to securing the postal vote than either the East Midlands or the North West.

In the East Midlands Region, following the 1964 General Election, "Disappointment was again expressed at the help given by safe Labour Constituencies to the important marginal constituencies... the E.C. hoped that safe constituencies will be able to export many more workers at the next General Election." (1) Again, in 1966 "We were able to effect some transfer of workers from safe to marginal constituencies, but there is still room for improvement in this field of activity." (2) In 1970 the Labour Party's "mutual aid" arrangements tended to be ad hoc and rather ineffective. D. Butler and K. Pinto-Duschinsky have calculated that "On the Labour side, about half the C.L.P.'s in Labour-held marginals received some outside help, but it

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1. 1965 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.8.
 2. 1966 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.10.

never amounted to more than 40% of the total canvassed and in three-quarters of them it constituted less than 10%."(1)

It is always difficult for regional organisers to persuade party workers to leave their own safe constituency and work in a nearby marginal. After several years in the doldrums in the late 1960's, mutual aid in the 1970 General Election became very difficult to effect, even from the safest constituencies. Dudley in the West Midlands, for example, had always helped in nearby Brierley Hill. In 1970, however, Dudley refused to help, bearing in mind its own position following a heavy by-election defeat in 1968. The East Midlands Regional Organiser asked Bassetlaw to help in nearby marginals, but the constituency did not consider itself "safe enough" to do this. On 14th June the East Midlands A.R.O., Mrs. M. Long, attended a meeting in the North East Derbyshire constituency (a safe Labour seat) to try and persuade party members to provide help in nearby Belper. Only after a long discussion was the A.R.O. able to persuade three car-loads of supporters to help. On 17th June Mrs. Long attempted to persuade a group of miners in the same constituency, North East Derbyshire, to help in Rushcliffe. They refused, saying that they were only prepared to help a left-wing candidate. Not even the promise of petrol expenses could make them leave their own constituency. Following the 1970 General Election, the East Midlands Regional Organiser wrote: "We were only able to transfer workers on a very limited scale. Workers from Mansfield, Ilkeston, Ashfield and North East Derbyshire went into Rushcliffe and Belper, but it was not possible to get any people to transfer on polling day."(2)

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1. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, op.cit., p.519.
 2. 1970 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.15.

Labour Party mutual aid efforts compare unfavourably with those of the Conservative Party.

Election day detail was a major concern during the last few days of the 1970 campaign. There are two priorities: the manning of committee rooms, and the provision of tellers at polling stations. The regional staff check that polling stations in strong Labour areas will be manned and that party workers will not be wasted by manning stations in areas which have not been canvassed. In the last few days regional organisers ask election agents for a list of polling day committee rooms. They also seek to secure final canvass figures from every election agent. These two pieces of information are required by Transport House. Regional organisers collect and collate this information before passing it to London.

The type of detail which regional staff deal with in the last few days of a campaign is well illustrated by reference to the agenda of a meeting held in the Bosworth constituency on 16th June, attended by Ron Simmons, A.R.O. East Midlands Region: (1)

Agenda

1. Report by Area Organisers on the Canvass.
2. Report by Area Organisers on Polling Day system to be used.
3. Committee Rooms:-

Addresses
Telephone Numbers
Payment

4. Staff:-

Committee Rooms
Number takers - rota payment
Knockers up

5. Cars:-

Where to report?
Decorating
Car Calls including Removals

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1. East Midlands Regional Office: File on 1970 General Election.

6. Materials required:-

Checkers Pads
Reading Pads
List of Postal Voters
Vote Labour (Wyatt) Today
Car Stickers
Pens and Pencils

7. P.A. Equipment

8. Candidate's Tour.

During the 1970 Election campaign telephone work was very important. The following examples from the three regions being examined, indicate the range of use:

- (a) Enquiries about exactly who is eligible for postal votes.
- (b) Enquiries about whether or not supplies of the popular manifesto are available at regional office.
- (c) Enquiries about when and where to meet national speakers.
- (d) Local radio stations requesting information about visits of front bench speakers to the area.
- (e) In the early stages of the campaign several election agents enquired whether or not their respective constituency associations should cancel annual dinners and similar functions. In order to avoid allegations of "treating", regional office normally advised in favour of cancellation.
- (f) Inevitably there were a lot of requests for speakers. All these needed to be dealt with firmly, particularly when non-marginal constituencies requested front bench speakers.

There was close contact with both press and television during the General Election campaign. Regional office was the most convenient unit for the mass media to deal with. Besides utilising the region directly for information, they also frequently went via regional office to contact constituencies.

For example, the Birmingham Post asked the West Midlands Regional Organiser to find six M.P.'s in his region to contribute to a question-and-answer column in the paper during the campaign. Similarly, the B.B.C. and I.T.V. often worked through regional office. Early in the campaign the B.B.C. contacted East Midlands Regional Office to ask for a candidate from the region to take part in a forthcoming election forum. It was left to the regional organiser to select and subsequently contact, a candidate.

In the 1970 General Election only the North West of the three regions being considered, produced regional literature. In the July/August edition of the Labour Organiser, Paul Carmody, the North West Regional Organiser, wrote:

"In spite of the pressure of work, the Regional Office were able to accept the responsibility for producing a Regional Broadsheet with a front page change. The centre spread was basically pictorial and extracted from our regional pamphlet "Success Story" which, incidentally, had sales exceeding one million copies. The back page of the Broadsheet contained a message from Harold Wilson which was angled to the Region's needs. We broke away from the traditional front page layout. We produced approximately one million copies with 38 editions.

"The Regional Office also offered a poster service. This was in the nature of an experiment and proved to be a tremendous success. We had a standardised design... 51 of our 79 constituencies used the service."(1)

The climax of the campaign was of course, polling day. Usually regional organisers remain in their offices throughout the day, with the exception of the occasional fleeting visit to a local polling station. The assistant regional organisers generally spend polling day working in marginal constituencies. They give advice and also work in a practical capacity, offering their services in routine matters such as "knocking-up" and

1. Labour Organiser. July/August 1970, pp.140,141.

providing transport. Frequently an A.R.O. will concentrate on a single constituency on election day.(1)

The regional organiser seemed to spend most of polling day with a telephone in his hand, ringing round his constituencies asking for figures and impressions of the situation. Certain questions were invariably asked by the organiser:

1. What % of the Labour canvass is voting?
2. Is anybody complaining of anything?
3. Is there any shortage of workers or cars?
4. How are the Tories doing?
5. How are things going in general?

Occasionally, the East Midlands Regional Organiser asked an agent to compare turnout in strong Labour areas with that in strong Conservative areas. This, however, was done only rarely. Even the most hopeless constituencies received at least one telephone call from the regional organiser "just to show Regional Office is interested."(2) Very occasionally, specific directives were given by the regional organiser to constituencies. On 18th June, for example, the A.R.O. working in Rushcliffe informed the regional organiser that, in her opinion, too many committee rooms were being manned and far too little "knocking-up" was being done. The regional organiser gave directives to close all committee rooms and concentrate in the last three hours on "knocking-up" in the Labour areas. Directives such as these are the exception rather than the rule, however, and, in any event, constituency parties may refuse to follow the regional directive.(3)

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1. In the East Midlands. For example, R. Simmons concentrated on Leicester and Mrs. M. Long on Rushcliffe. In the West Midlands W. Burley spent June 18th in the Ladywood constituency.
 2. Mr. J. Cattermole, interview, 18.6.70.
 3. The author spent June 18th 1970 in the East Midlands Regional Office.

On polling day most of the information received by regional office from election agents was extremely vague. Almost all reports from constituencies were wholly impressionistic, for example: "things seem to be going well", and, "it looks like a high turnout". Only very occasionally did meaningful figures come in. Consequently, when Transport House telephoned regional office (as they did on several occasions throughout the day) the organiser could only provide party headquarters with impressionistic analyses of the situation. In 1970 almost all East Midlands constituencies reported a high turnout. The regional organiser transferred these impressions to Transport House. In retrospect, this widely-held opinion was quite false since turnouts were below average. This points to a weakness in the Labour Party's intelligence network - a weakness which will be examined later in the chapter.

Military terminology is frequently applied to General Election campaigns.⁽¹⁾ Such language, however, is totally inappropriate. There is no centralised chain of command. Regional organisers cannot direct constituencies, as was clearly evidenced by their inability to move party workers from safe to marginal constituencies. All that regional organisers can do is to suggest, advise and persuade. The position is not greatly different in the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party

During the 1970 General Election campaign there was a greater degree of professionalism at the constituency level in the Conservative Party than in the Labour Party. It was this relative

1. See, for example, 1950 Report of the West Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party, pp.3,4. The Chairman's address used these terms.

competence in the constituencies which helped to account for the rather different role played by area agents during the election. Whereas only 128 constituency Labour Parties had the services of full-time organisers as election agents, 439 Conservative associations were manned by certificated agents and 36 others by certificated organisers.(1) In the Conservative Party, therefore, only 141 constituencies were supervised by unqualified agents. The relative abundance of qualified agents enabled area staff to devote far more time and effort to overall strategy than the more hard-pressed Labour Party regional organisers. Conservative area agents were free to plan the transfer of workers from safe to marginal constituencies; they were able to engage in extensive intelligence work within the area; they were able to devote more thought to press and television work than was possible for Labour Party regional staff; they provided an answering service on policy matters at area office (questions which could not be answered by the area were passed for reply to the Questions of Policy Committee at the Conservative Research Department). The difference between the two parties at the 1970 General Election was one of resources.

A first priority in 1970 was the allocation of election agents to needy constituencies. On May 18th the North West Area was short of "15 to 18 election agents".(2) Indeed, in Spring 1970 there were only 33 full-time agents in the region (79 constituencies). Both the East Midlands (26 out of 42) and the West Midlands (41 out of 60) were in a much healthier position at the outset of the campaign. In the East Midlands there were a small number of hopeless constituencies, such as

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1. "Certificated Organisers stop at the second examination of the three which Certificated Agents are required to pass. They receive a lower scale of pay owing to their diminished responsibilities." Letter to the author from Richard Webster, Director of Organisation, 30.11.70.
 2. A.S. Garner, interview, 17.12.70.

Moreover, without election agents at the outset of the campaign. By 18th May all the West Midlands constituencies had appointed election agents.

The selection of Parliamentary candidates was also a top priority. In 1970 all three areas had one candidate to select and, along with the allocation of election agents, this took up time at the outset of the campaign. The routine work concerned with front bench speakers and national tours was very similar to that done by Labour Party regional organisers.

Early in the campaign Donald Stringer, a deputy area agent, visited each of the uncertificated agents in the West Midlands Area to advise them on basic organisational matters. Later, the deputy area agents visited every constituency, "good, bad or indifferent".(1) This stage had been completed by 4th June. After analysing reports of visits, the area agent decided that four constituencies in the area needed special attention - "in all these we were nervous about the agent".(2)

During the campaign most full-time Conservative election agents had very little contact with area office. When asked about contact with his area agent, Mr. N.E. Webster, full-time election agent at Cheadle, a marginal constituency, replied: "We talk on the 'phone a couple of times a week. He does not run the show from Area Office and does not come down much. He (A.B. Garner) spent five minutes discussing the type of posters we were using and also contacted me on one other matter. We are in touch but he does not control the set up."(3) The Conservative agent

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1. J. Galloway, interview, 9.6.70.
 2. J. Galloway, interview, 9.6.70.
 3. N.E. Webster, interview, 12.6.70.

for Stockport North and South asserted: "Garner needs to give help to younger and less experienced agents at election time. It is quite an ordeal for them."(1) Full-time election agents were often reluctant to request help from the area for fear of giving the impression that they were not competent at their job. As in the Labour Party, area agents directed most effort towards marginal constituencies.(2) "to encourage them, congratulate them or sort out their problems, whatever the case may be."(3) As one area agent put it, their job was, in the absence of important local crises, "going round with the oil can".(4)

In the East Midlands and North West information was circulated at the start of the campaign, outlining the services which would be available at area office, and providing advice on basic issues, such as postal votes. The West Midlands Area Agent had already informed constituency agents of the division of responsibility within area office before the election campaign broke. The relatively small amount of material sent out by area offices underlines the greater professionalism of Conservative Party organisation at the constituency level. There was no need to remind election agents about routine organisational matters at frequent intervals during the campaign. The Labour Party, however, needed to provide a continuous flow of basic organisational and legal information, particularly to the 458 constituencies manned by voluntary workers.(5)

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1. P.W. Goulding, M.B.E., interview, 15.6.70.
 2. West Midlands Area staff visited the marginal Wrekin constituency "8 or 10 times" during the 1970 campaign - J. Galloway, 24.8.70.
 3. P.K. Livingston, interview, 28.5.70.
 4. P.K. Livingston, interview, 28.5.70.
 5. Labour Party, General Election Agents Guide, 1970.

During the 1970 campaign there was a specialisation of functions at Conservative area offices, which contrasted with the generalist philosophy forced on the Labour Party by its need for detailed work in the constituencies. The following circular illustrates the specialisation at East Midlands Area Office: (1)

East Midlands Area Office

Responsibilities of Departments

C.O.A. J. Livingston Secretary: Miss R. Mothersole	Liaison with Central Office. Election Law, Organisation matters, Shadow Cabinet and Front Bench Speakers. Intelligence reports.
P.O.A. Miss Jeanne de Jonghe Secretary: Mrs. B. Gathercole	Area M.P.'s and Voluntary Speakers, Postal Votes, Priority Removal Scheme, Reports on Meetings, Special responsibilities for certain constituencies which have been notified.
M.O.A. Mr. Ward Secretary: Mrs. T. Link	Press, T.V. and Radio Election Campaign (Also assisting C.O.A.)
Political Information Mr. P. Howard	Policy matters Political Information Reports on Broadcasts.

The North West adopted similar functional specialisation, but this system was not favoured by the West Midlands Area Agent. He asserted that "If there was rigid demarcation within this office certain issues would not be dealt with promptly. It is not convenient saying A is in charge of this and B is in charge of that. I like to be kept free with plenty of elbow room". (2) Even in the West Midlands, however, despite the area agent's dislike of functional specialisation, there was a division of responsibilities, albeit rather less distinct than in the other two areas. The different approaches reflected,

1. Circular sent out by East Midlands Area Office, May 1970.
2. Mr. J. Galloway, interview, 24.8.70.

fairly accurately, the personalities of the area agents in question. In "peace time" the West Midlands is more centralised than either of the other two areas. The General Election merely emphasised the different outlooks of the three area agents and the different ways in which they organised their work.

The Conservative Party takes "intelligence" for more seriously than the Labour Party because of its larger resources, but also because its area agents have ample time to engage in this work. In 1970 the Labour Party made a belated attempt to organise political intelligence. On 28th May the National Agent sent the following circular to all Labour candidates:

Important Organisational Matters.

In wishing you well in your campaign, I want to assure you that we will provide the best possible service from Transport House, and you will know, of course, that our Regional Organising Staff are ever ready and willing to assist you....

I should be grateful if you would let your Regional Organiser have full details of any items of news value you may come across of the campaign (a) on your own activities and (b) on the activities of the Opposition - that we can use against them. Your Regional Organiser will then be able to transmit the full story to us in order that we can give it the maximum publicity nationally.(1)

On the same day the National Agent sent a circular to his regional organisers containing basic information about intelligence work. However, the circular was not produced until ten days after the announcement of the General Election had been made:

The Organisation and Publicity Planning Group will be meeting early every morning at Transport House, and in order that we can make the best possible use of our joint endeavours, it is very necessary for me to know how the campaign is shaping in your region.

1. Letter from R.G. Hayward, National Agent, 28th May 1970, N.A.D./O.E./18.

To do this, I should be grateful if you would prepare, each Sunday, a short report giving these details and post it early enough so that I receive it by first post each Monday morning.

In addition, please do not hesitate at any time to let me have your advice, suggestions or criticism of aspects of the campaign in order (a) that we can improve it and (b) that we can assist you on any matter which is peculiar to your region.(1)

This was the thrust of the Labour Party's intelligence network in 1970. The role played by regional organisers was of little significance compared with that of Conservative area agents. In each of the three regions being considered not a single candidate forwarded information to the regional organiser to pass on to London. In sum, the regions had little or no part to play in the Labour Party's intelligence system.

The contrast with the Conservative Party was marked. Area agents were left to organise their own intelligence networks and, naturally, there was some variation. Two of the area agents relied on candidates and, more particularly, election agents, to supply them with information. The West Midlands Area Agent made greater use of "non-participants", namely ordinary party members not directly involved in the campaign. Their task was to provide information for the area agent on the depth of feeling amongst the electorate, perceptions of the national and local campaign, as well as information about opposition tactics within the constituency. There were obvious drawbacks to this method of securing information. It is difficult for a constituency member, whether "active" or "non-participant", to be objective in his analysis of the local situation. The reliability of information reaching area office

1. Letter from R.G. Hayward, National Agent, to Regional organisers 28th May 1970. NAD/RO.G.E.9.

from the constituencies is, therefore, open to question.(1)

Each constituency intelligence officer, whether voluntary or professional, telephoned area office regularly at a pre-determined time. The reports were usually taken down by a deputy area agent who then passed the information to the area agent. In the West Midlands area Galloway used 60 people in his intelligence network, one for each constituency. Each person telephoned area office between 8.15 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. every third morning, so that on any given morning 20 intelligence reports were in the area office by 9.00 a.m. The area agent then sifted through the incoming reports, produced a summary and telephoned his main findings through to Central Office at a pre-arranged time before 9.45 a.m., the time of the National News Conference briefing meeting. The Director of Organisation at Central Office received the reports and provided the Party Leader with any significant material which could be utilised at the daily news conference.

There are, however, certain inherent drawbacks to this aspect of Conservative Party intelligence. At the local level, the constituency intelligence officer, except where he is the constituency agent, is not a trained person and all too often is something of a nuisance. Appointing someone as "intelligence officer" keeps him out of the way and allows the agent to get on with more important organisational matters in the constituency. Secondly, it is questionable whether the reports reaching Central Office influence the leaders in their policy proposals or electoral strategy. In the 1970 General Election there were only two or three major issues, notably the cost of living and

1. For further development of this theme see D.J. Wilson, "Campaigns and Communications", New Society, 1st April, 1971.

wages. When the party leadership concentrated on a given topic the intelligence officers were fond of saying "we told you so". There is, however, little evidence to substantiate their claims.

Despite the time and effort put in by so many people at the constituency and area level, constituency party intelligence, as outlined above, is undoubtedly crude. Area agents probably overplay its importance and exaggerate the value of their own particular contribution. During the 1970 campaign P.K. Livingston, East Midlands Area Agent, told the author that he had just received a report quoting one Labour M.P. in his area as having said that high taxation was inevitable in a modern western society. The area agent immediately contacted London to break this piece of news which, he suggested, would make the headlines in the first editions of the evening papers in London. Nothing more was heard of the report. During the same campaign the West Midlands Area Agent managed to procure a letter written by one of the strike leaders in the Co-operative Insurance Society agents' dispute and he immediately communicated this to London. Again, nothing more was heard of it. Whether the party leadership utilised these two pieces of information in a more general manner is difficult to judge. One thing is certain, however, namely that local issues are rarely referred to by national speakers, even though they are regarded with such importance at the area level. Viewed from party headquarters, local news is very small fry and is treated accordingly. Area agents who assert that their reports had a major impact on the style of campaigning in 1970 are living in a world remote from Central Office. It could be argued that during a General Election campaign area office has little work

to do and therefore spends much of its time on a number of unnecessary activities. There can be no doubt that a great deal of time is spent on intelligence work. The real doubt concerns the importance of the work done at area level. The intelligence network is crude and the end product hardly sophisticated. Nevertheless, given the Conservative Party's existing intelligence system, area agents have an important role to play, sifting information and transmitting the major patterns of opinion to London.

During the 1970 General Election the Labour Party relied more than the Conservative Party on its M.P.'s for intelligence material. The national tours made by party leaders were particularly important. In the campaign George Brown addressed 98 meetings in 8 of the 11 regions. He contacted Transport House three times a day throughout the tour, twice to obtain details of the policy priorities and once to report on his impressions of the campaign. In this way Party headquarters gradually became aware of grass-roots feeling in at least some parts of the country. The Labour Party possibly spent too little time on intelligence in 1970, but the Conservatives went to the opposite extreme.

Transfer of workers, or "mutual aid", is an important function at area level. In the Labour Party mutual aid was haphazard in 1970. The west Midlands Assistant Regional Organiser asserted: "We never got down to detailed work about transfer availability of workers. We have so few full time agents we just cannot tackle this work. The Tories concentrate on transfer of workers - ideally this is what we should be doing"(1)

1. W. Burley, interview, 3.7.70.

In the Conservative Party, aid to "critical" seats had been planned many months ahead. In the North West area mutual aid was begun some fifteen months before the 1970 General Election. The area office arranged a series of meetings between constituencies to discuss detail. While the initiatives were taken by the area, details about the numbers and reception of workers were left to the constituencies concerned. In the North West in 1970 seven constituencies were in receipt of aid. For example, Macclesfield worked in Cheadle; Pylde in Preston. The Altrincham and Sale constituency was allocated two wards in Stretford during the campaign.

In the West Midlands Area plans for mutual aid were laid in March 1969. The West Midlands Area Agent observed that in determining the details of mutual aid "You have got to take three things into account: need, availability and geographical situation. Then we have got to sell it to the constituencies." (1) In 1970 six major mutual aid agreements were made in the West Midlands Area:

Cirencester and Tewkesbury to Gloucester
Stratford to Rugby
Warwick and Leamington to Coventry South
South Worcestershire to Oldbury and Halesowen
Solihull to Meriden
Sutton Coldfield to Perry Barr.

In 1970 certain constituency associations promised to give a specific number of "man hours" to a neighbouring critical seat or else take responsibility for particular wards or polling districts in a nearby critical constituency. The Stratford-on-Avon constituency was allocated a ward of 1,500 electors in the Rugby constituency. This meant delivering literature, canvassing, manning committee rooms and polling stations. In short, they were allocated a specific area of the Rugby constituency and

1. J. Galloway, interview, 9.6.70.

left to get on with the job. The following extract from the Meriden Conservative Association Chairman's address for 1969 indicates the long-term nature of mutual aid in the West Midlands prior to the 1970 General Election:

"The strong Conservative areas will be fully stretched in giving support at Chelmsley and one or two other selected districts. Here I would like to acknowledge the help that Solihull Association are giving us by way of mutual aid and also the help being given by the West Midlands Area Conservative Association." (1)

In the East Midlands the area agent was planning his mutual aid effort in readiness for an October election. There was no long-term strategy as in the other two areas. It was not until the end of April 1970 that the Duke of Rutland agreed to become Mutual Aid Officer. He immediately contacted all the constituencies which were expected to give help to remind them of their responsibilities. A sign of the hurried nature of mutual aid preparations in the East Midlands was that the area had a mutual aid conference planned for Saturday May 30th at which detailed arrangements were to have been made. The announcement of a June election saw the scrapping of these plans. Instead, the mutual aid officer went round the constituencies in an attempt to stimulate interest. (2) During the General Election the bulk of help given in the East Midlands came from five constituencies: Harborough, Melton, Leicester South East, Carlton and West Derbyshire. The main recipients were South Nottingham, Leicester South West and High Peak. On a smaller scale, Grantham and Gainsborough both helped in Lincoln, while Rutland and Stamford gave some aid in Peterborough. (3) In South Nottingham one ward with 10,000 electors was completely taken over by Melton.

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1. From 1970 Meriden Conservative Association Annual Report.
 2. P.K. Livingston, interview, 28.5.70; 2.7.70.
 3. P.K. Livingston, interview, 2.7.70.

D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky have observed that in 1970 "at least two-thirds of Conservative associations in Labour-held marginals received 'mutual aid'. In over three-quarters of these constituencies this had been organised through the area office before the campaign; in 10 of them it had been fixed directly with the constituency that was providing the help; and in the remaining 10, the arrangements were made during the campaign. Slightly over half the C.L.P.s in Labour-held marginals received outside help, arranged in half these constituencies by the regional office before the campaign."(1)

The greater sophistication of the Conservative Party's mutual aid efforts can hardly be denied. What is more problematical, however, is the success of the schemes which the area offices produced. Area office may produce a whole series of plans yet very little notice might be taken by the constituency parties involved. The North West Area Agent remarked that "It is nonsense to see mutual aid in terms of armies of workers running from constituency to constituency. From what I have heard mutual aid is working better than ever before in the North West Region. Preston is receiving enormous help from North and South Pylde. On some nights up to 30 people are going over to Preston to help."(2) The area cannot command; all it can do is to try to persuade party members in "safe" Conservative seats to help in nearby marginal seats. In the final analysis the success or failure of mutual aid depends upon the degree of enthusiasm at the local level.

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1. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, op.cit., p.319
 2. A.S. Garner, interview, 13.6.70.

Conservative Party area agents have greater opportunities to specialise during General Elections because of the limited amount of work they are required to do at the constituency level. All three area offices were able to produce elaborate Press Guides for the 1970 campaign. The West Midlands Area produced a comprehensive document covering all 60 constituencies in the region. Released on Friday 22nd May, it contained a list of candidates, agents, central committee rooms, and election results from 1955. It also contained information on the geographical composition of constituencies and biographical notes on each Conservative candidate. On its front cover it stated: "All Press and T.V. enquiries for West Midlands Area to: David Peel, Conservative and Unionist Central Office, 18, Milverton Terrace, Leamington Spa. Issued by Publicity Department, Conservative Central Office (West Midlands Area)."(1) The East Midlands and the North West likewise indulged in public relations work, producing equally elaborate press handouts. Such work was beyond the scope of the Labour Party regional staff with their extensive commitments at the constituency level.

The Conservative Party's area structure has no independent income of its own. The area level simply acts as a post office, collecting money from the constituencies and passing it on to the centre or, during General Elections, passing Central Office money to the constituencies to enable them to fight a campaign.(2) In the Labour Party, however, there are two distinct sources of finance for constituency parties during an election campaign, namely Transport House and the Party's regional organisation.

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1. West Midlands Area Press Guide, released 22nd May 1970.
 2. J. Galloway, interview, 9.6.70.

There is, as in the Conservative Party, a system of head office aid to constituencies. Most constituencies apply for aid from Transport House at the outset of a campaign. In addition there is a Regional Election Fund which operates independent of Transport House. It obtains its funds mainly through the appeals of the regional organiser to trade unions in his region. After the election the regional organiser distributes the money as needed so that, if possible, no constituency incurs a deficit from the campaign. Some unions contribute large sums to the regional funds. In 1959, for example, the N.U.M. donated £2,000, and the Textile Workers £3,000, to the North West Region's General Election appeal.(1) In 1970 in the East Midlands Region the Nottinghamshire Miners gave £8,000 to the Regional Election fund, plus £100 to each of the 10 Nottinghamshire constituencies.(2)

In 1966 the largest grants made by the East Midlands Regional Council to constituencies in the region were £300 to Holland-with-Boston and £250 to Derby.(3) In fact, regional councils often make a profit from their Election appeals, as in the East Midlands when, in 1966, some £2,500 was left in the fund following the election. In the 1970 General Election, 14 of the 40 constituencies in the East Midlands Region had sponsored candidates. All the rest received grants from the Regional Fund after the election, the smallest being £50 toellingborough and Northampton and the largest £500 to South West Leicester and Central Nottingham.(4)

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1. 1959 North West Regional Council Annual Report, p.21.
 2. J. Cattermole, interview, 12.9.70.
 3. J. Cattermole, interview, 17.2.70.
 4. Letter from J. Cattermole, 22.12.70.

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In some ways the existence of a regional fund is a useful lever in the hands of a regional organiser during an election. A constituency which falls out of line with the regional organiser during the campaign can be told not to expect any help when balancing its books after the election. Disputes rarely reach this level, however, and the sanction mentioned above is more potential than actual. Nevertheless, it is a sanction which Conservative area agents do not possess; however, they hardly need it since far more of their constituencies are well organised from the start of a campaign.

Polling day itself witnessed certain differences between the three Conservative Party areas being considered. In the East Midlands all the girls in the area office at Loughborough assisted in the local constituency (Bosworth), so that on the morning of June 18th there was only Livingston and the cleaner in the office (the cleaner manned the telephone). In the morning the deputy area agent, Eric Ward, toured some constituencies, while in the afternoon he stayed in the office and the area chairman, along with the area agent visited constituencies. Throughout the day Miss J. de Jonghe (D.C.G.A.) was touring the far outposts of the region. Every constituency was visited, albeit briefly, and by 8.00 p.m. all three organisers were back at area office. Such a tour is, as Livingston observed, "entirely a P.R. job".(1) No substantive advice was offered at this late stage. The North West adopted similar tactics on polling day: "It was a P.R. exercise. Constituencies like to see us."(2)

1. P.K. Livingston, interview, 2.7.70.

2. A.S. Garner, interview, 2.9.70.

The West Midlands Area was somewhat different. On polling day the area agent cast his own vote and then went to the office to read the papers and a book. At 7.00 p.m. he went home for a meal. The deputy area agents went out as voluntary workers in the constituencies. At area office Galloway did not receive a single telephone call throughout the day. There was no P.R. tour for Galloway on polling day. He maintained that the constituency agent ought to be allowed to get on with his job, and in doing this he has no time to entertain the area agent or his staff. Galloway also gave instructions to the democratically elected area officers not to travel round the area on polling day.

The West Midlands Area Agent described his role in the 1970 General Election in the following way:

"There is no doubt at all that within the limitations of a voluntary organisation I was the General Director of this area. I was not in a position formally to give orders. My opinions were supported by moral authority and respect. Without exception I was regarded, and regarded myself, as General Director of the area, in a benevolent sort of way."(1)

The North West Area Agent provided a rather more realistic analysis of his role:

- a) to ensure constituencies have both candidates and agents.
- b) to provide an advisory and information service on organisation, election law and policy.
- c) to allocate speakers and plan their programmes to the best advantage.
- d) to see that there is the best possible organisation in the critical seats.
- e) to help the constituencies in every way possible.

I am not a commanding officer. I have no power. You try to get yourself into a position so people come to you for help and advice.(2)

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1. J. Galloway, interview, 24.8.70.
 2. A.S. Garner, interview, 2.9.70.

Summary

The poor state of Labour Party organisation at the outset of the 1970 General Election campaign necessitated detailed intervention by regional organisers on elementary matters such as filling in nomination forms and designing election addresses. While the large number of volunteer agents received daily notes from Transport House offering legal and organisational advice, many of the less experienced volunteers still required considerable help from regional office, particularly during the first two weeks of the campaign. Labour Party regional organisers were involved, of necessity, with routine organisational matters at the constituency level. The Conservative Party presents a rather different picture. Its greater professionalism made work at the constituency level less essential and enabled area agents to focus on other issues during the campaign. Conservative area agents devoted a disproportionately large amount of time to matters such as intelligence work, mutual aid, policy matters, press and publicity work. Quite how useful this work was cannot easily be assessed but much of it appears to have had relatively little pay-off in return for the time and effort put in at area level. While the genuine usefulness of regional organisers during a General Election campaign cannot easily be denied, the value of area agents is open to question.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Most studies of British political parties have stressed the centralised organisation and structure of power in the Labour and Conservative Parties. Almost without exception their conclusions have been reached without even a cursory look at regional organisation in the two parties. The existence, let alone the significance, of this organisational level has not been fully recognised. This thesis has provided a detailed analysis of the role of regional organisers and area agents within their respective parties, focussing upon their relationships with national, constituency and city party units. The aim has not been to elevate regional and area organisation to an artificially important position, but rather to examine this organisational level with a view to establishing its precise role. In elaborating this hitherto neglected aspect of party organisation the study has clarified the nature and extent of centralisation in the Labour and Conservative Parties.

It has been shown that both the Conservative and Labour Parties established regional organisations to serve the needs of their respective leaderships. Conservative and Labour Party head offices still retain relatively detailed control over the work of regional and area staff. For their part, however, regional and area organisers exercise little control over constituency party activities. Constituency associations are voluntary units, and consequently there are few sanctions which regional and area staff are able to use against constituencies ignoring their directives. When pressure is applied regional and area staff frequently fail to achieve their objectives.

Attention was drawn to the differences which exist at the constituency level in the Labour and Conservative Parties. Labour Party regional organisers are endowed with formal authority at the constituency level in their capacity as National Executive Committee representatives. They exercise regulatory roles during the selection of prospective Parliamentary candidates and full-time constituency party agents. The establishment of the National Agency Scheme in July 1969 provided regional organisers with a further source of authority at the constituency level.⁽¹⁾ Conservative Party area agents lack any such formal authority at the constituency level although there are some indications that change is imminent.

From 1974 onwards it appears that area agents will have a degree of authority at the constituency level that has hitherto been denied them. This development has its roots in suggested changes to the agency service proposed by Lord Carrington, Conservative Party Chairman, in July 1973:

"It is... my intention to begin to introduce the central employment of Agents. I recognise that this cannot be done overnight so I have set what I believe is a realistic target over the next year for central employment in what we agree are the priority seats. These are the seats where the next Election will be won or lost, in other words those seats which we think we have the best chance of gaining or which are most at risk from our opponents. There are 131 of these seats and I propose introducing central employment in them in two stages. We will aim to conclude the negotiations in 84 seats by the end of this year so that their Agents will be employed centrally by the Party with effect from 1st January 1974. In the other 47 seats we hope to conclude negotiations during the first part of next year so that central employment will be brought in on 1st August 1974... I have no doubt that our eventual goal should be

1. In 1970 there were 40 agents employed in this scheme.

central employment right across the board. With that end in mind, I am proposing that all trainee Agents, on achieving their intermediate certificate, which allows them to take on their first constituency, will automatically become centrally employed agents."(1)

Despite the official line that "the gradual introduction of central employment will not destroy the autonomy of constituency associations"(2) there seems little doubt that the introduction of this scheme will permit Conservative area agents a degree of authority at the constituency level not unlike that enjoyed by Labour Party regional organisers. Central employment implies a degree of central control which, on a day-to-day basis, invariably means area control. Area agents believe that the Carrington proposals will enable them to provide greater direction at the constituency level and, as one area agent put it, allow them to exert "much larger influence over their activities".(3) In practice, however, many constituency associations are likely to resist further incursions from area office.

It has been argued in this study that the Conservative Party's greater professionalism in the constituencies has meant that it has less need of an intermediate organisational level than the Labour Party. The Labour Party not only has fewer full-time constituency agents, but it also has far fewer party activists. In 1970, for example, there were only 141 full-time Labour agents covering the 618 constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales. Individual Party membership stood at between

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1. Conservative Central Office, News Service Release, 20th July 1973, p.2. See also "Tory agents will be employed centrally in reformed structure" by John Groser, The Times, 21st July 1973, p.2.
 2. Conservative Central Office, News Service Release, op.cit., p.4.
 3. E. Ward, interview, 11.10.73.

310,000 and 385,000 in the same year. Weak constituency organisation has meant that the Labour Party's regional organising staff fulfils an important organising role at the constituency level. Regional organisers are able to provide a degree of expertise which would otherwise be unobtainable. Often, of course, many of the most poorly organised constituencies are politically "hopeless" and the provision of aid may be questioned on "productivity" grounds. Regional aid does, however, enable weak constituencies to maintain a political challenge in circumstances where it would otherwise be extremely difficult.

The Conservative Party, with a relatively large number of full-time constituency agents and party members, is less dependent on area aid at the constituency level. Besides having between $1\frac{1}{2}$ and $1\frac{3}{4}$ million members, the Conservative Party had 386 full-time constituency agents in 1970. Almost all critical, marginal and safe constituencies employed a full-time agent and were, therefore, relatively self-sufficient from an organisational standpoint. Area agents were reduced to merely acting as spectators in all but the most hopeless constituencies. In both parties regional and area influence is greatest in the least politically significant constituencies.

City parties have traditionally posed problems for area agents and regional organisers. Their relatively self-contained, highly centralised organisational structures have enabled them to resist regional and area pressure to abandon their independent identities and conform to head office requirements. However, as city parties are now finding it increasingly difficult to employ large organising staffs of their own they have tended to become increasingly reliant on aid from regional or area

office. In the North West, for example, Liverpool Conservative Association has been forced, for financial reasons, to allow its Chief Agent to become a Deputy Central Office Area Agent, a change which will undoubtedly enhance area influence within the city. Birmingham and Manchester Conservative Associations have so far managed to withstand similar Central Office pressure for change. Labour's Borough Parties have been obliged to accept substantial aid from regional office as their own machines have withered away to almost nothing. In both the Conservative and Labour Parties, however, the deeply rooted traditions of hostility between city parties and area/regional offices are still evident. The influence of regional and area staff is largely determined by the needs, disposition and resources of individual city parties.

It was postulated in the Introduction that regional organisers and area agents act as the field administrative agents of their respective leaderships. The thesis has indicated the wide variety of ways in which regional and area staff serve their party leaders. It has also been shown that organisers are subject to detailed supervision by the centre, notably through the reporting-in procedures which are particularly stringent in the Labour Party. One of the major justifications for the maintenance of regional and area organisation is that it serves to keep the centre informed about party activity at the constituency level. Regional organisers and area agents are regarded as essential links in the chain of information, both from the centre to the constituencies and also from the grass-roots to the party leadership. Although afforded some freedom within nationally determined frameworks of action, regional and area organisers nevertheless remain the agents of the centre.

While the desire of both party leaderships for some form of field staff in the provinces stimulated the development of area and regional organisation, it is questionable whether the Conservative and Labour Parties still require such extensive regional networks. In opting for this form of organisational machinery both parties acted contrary to traditional administrative practice in Britain. Only since the Second World War has Whitehall begun to decentralise workload to the provinces. Traditionally, London-based civil servants either summoned individuals and delegations to visit them, or else they themselves visited the provinces when the need arose. The decentralised pattern of party organisation is, however, now firmly established in Britain, with regional organisers and area agents fulfilling what are frequently regarded by the National Executive Committee and the Conservative Party leadership as essential tasks. The continuance of this network, particularly in the Conservative Party, is, however, questionable on productivity grounds.

Improved communications in the post-war years have reduced the need for regionally-based staff. London is no longer remote, even to the most distant regions, thus a system of revolving secondment instead of permanent regional staff is a possible alternative organisational strategy. Given the Conservative Party's relatively efficient constituency organisation, some form of revolving secondment from the centre could well be more useful than the maintenance of an elaborate area network which is often under-utilised. During the 1970 General Election, for example, while Labour Party regional organisers were heavily committed at the constituency level throughout the campaign, Conservative Party area agents devoted much of their time to

intelligence work. There was relatively little need for area staff to involve themselves at the constituency level. In the Conservative Party, if not in the organisationally weaker Labour Party, the maintenance of an extensive area network is an organisational luxury.

Both regional organisers and area agents operate in a political and social vacuum. There appears to be relatively little commitment to the concept of regionalism or provincial government in Britain. The evidence of the Commission on the Constitution, for example, indicated that in no part of Britain did half the people endorse a new system of regional government. The proportion favouring change was much the same in all regions, ranging from Scotland (47%), the South (46%), the North West (39%), and the South West (29%).⁽¹⁾ Along with the absence of natural regions, this lack of commitment has meant that regional politics in Britain is somewhat anomalous. Whether the changes in local government, due to come into effect on 1st April 1974, will strengthen the regional concept by creating larger local authorities is open to question.⁽²⁾ Similarly, one implementation of the Commission on the Constitution would probably also strengthen regionalism in Britain. At present, however, regional organisers and area agents are operating in splendid isolation at the regional level.

It has been shown in this study that there is no chain of command from the party leaderships to the constituency and

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1. Devolution and other aspects of Government. Commission on the Constitution, Research Paper 7, H.M.S.O.
 2. The Local Government Act, 1972, created 39 Non-Metropolitan County Councils and 6 Metropolitan Counties in the largest conurbations in England and Wales. These new authorities come into being on 1st April 1974.

branch levels via regional and area organisers. The chain of command from the centre ends at the regional level. Regional organisers and area agents cannot act as centralising agents for their parties because, although their own relationship with the centre is tightly controlled, they themselves have generally lacked formal authority at the constituency level. The voluntary nature of constituency parties often makes it extremely difficult for regional and area staff to exert influence, let alone authority at the local level. The importance of regional organisers and area agents within their respective parties must not be exaggerated. At the same time, without an acknowledgement of the role of regional and area organisation our picture of English party organisation is incomplete.

APPENDIX A

REGIONAL AND AREA ORGANISATION: THE FORMAL FRAMEWORK.

1. The National Framework

(a) The Conservative Party

"In the constitution and organisation three elements go to make up the Conservative Party: (a) The Parliamentary Party in both Houses of Parliament, (b) The Conservative and Unionist Association for each constituency organised in the National Union, and (c) The Conservative and Unionist Central Office." (1) The governing body of the National Union is the Central Council. This has a membership of some 3,000, drawn mainly from constituency associations, but it includes the following representatives of each Provincial Area of the National Union: (a) The President, Chairman, Honorary Treasurer and one other representative of the Provincial Area Council, and (b) The Chairman (or a deputy) and one other representative of each duly constituted and approved Provincial Area Advisory Committee. (2)

The Executive Committee of the National Union is dominated by representatives from the areas. Rule XII Clause 3 states that there are:

- (a) Seven representatives appointed by each Provincial Area - the Chairman, the Treasurer, the Chairman of the Women's Advisory Committee, one Young Conservative, one Trade Unionist, and two elected representatives. (The Trade Unionist representative shall be one of the two Area representatives elected to the Trade Unionists' National Advisory Committee.)

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1. The Party Organisation. Central Office, 1964.
 2. The Rules and Standing Orders of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, Revised 1970, Rule IX, Clause 7.

- (b) Where a Provincial Area Comprises more than thirty constituencies there shall be one additional representative for each additional ten constituencies (or a broken number of less than ten but more than five). The Northern Provincial Area shall be entitled to one additional representative so long as it comprises not less than thirty-four constituencies. In any Provincial Area in which are situated one or more constituencies, at least one elected representative shall be from a City Association. In addition to the above, Areas with fifty or more constituencies shall be entitled to appoint one extra Young Conservative representative to serve on the Executive Committee.
- (c) In the event of Young Conservative representatives being unable to attend meetings, alternates may be appointed to represent them provided that such alternates are members of their respective Area Young Conservative Advisory Committees.

This means that areas are represented in the following proportions on the Executive Committee:

	Constituencies	Representatives on Executive Committee
1. Greater London	103	15
2. Northern (Cumberland, Durham Northumberland and Middlesbrough)	34	3
3. North Western (Lancashire, Cheshire, Westmorland)	79	13
4. Yorkshire (excluding Middlesbrough)	54	10
5. East Midlands (Derbyshire, Leicestershire Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Rutland)	42	8
6. West Midlands (Gloucestershire excluding Bristol, Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire)	60	11
7. Eastern (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Suffolk)	40	8
8. South Eastern (Kent, Surrey and Sussex)	34	8
9. Wessex (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Dorsetshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire)	37	8
10. Western (Cornwall, Devonshire, Somersetshire, Bristol)	28	7
11. Wales and Monmouthshire	36	8

The Executive Committee also includes the Leader of the Party and the principal officers and officials of the Party, as well as representatives from the Scottish Unionist Association and the Ulster Unionist Council.(1) Each Area Chairman is also a member of the smaller General Purposes Committee of the National Union.(2) It meets monthly and considers reports of the National Advisory Committees and resolutions passed by Area Councils and by Central Constituency Associations. In the Conservative Party each level of organisation is integrated into the next in a manner which is foreign to the Labour Party. In the Conservative Party the area level is of considerable importance nationally, many of the national representatives being chosen from the area organisation.

(b) The Labour Party

Whilst the Conservative Party's Executive Committee is chosen almost exclusively from amongst area level representatives, Labour Party regional councils play no constitutional part in electing representatives to the National Executive Committee. In addition, while the Conservative Party's Central Council draws its membership mainly from the constituencies, some people from each area council are also eligible for membership.(3) The

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1. The Party Organisation. Central Office, 1964, p.18.
 2. Conservative Party Rules, Rule XIV Clause 3(a)
 3. At the national level the Labour Party's annual conference is constituted in the manner set out below.
 - a) Delegates duly appointed by each affiliated Trade Union or other organisations to the number of one delegate for each 5,000 members or part thereof....
 - b) Delegates duly appointed by Constituency Labour Parties (or Trades Councils acting as such...)
 - c) Delegates duly appointed by Central Labour Parties or Trades Councils acting as such in Divided Boroughs not exceeding one for each Central Labour Party.
 - d) Delegates duly appointed by Federations not exceeding one for each Federation.
 - e) Ex officio Members of the Party Conference as follows:
 1. Members of the National Executive Committee
 2. Members of the Parliamentary Labour Party
 3. Parliamentary Labour Candidates whose candidatures have been duly endorsed by the National Executive Committee.
 4. The Secretary of the Party.
- (1968 Labour Party Annual Conference Report, Appendix 3, pp.331,332.)

Labour Party's regional organisation does not come into play for selecting delegates to the Annual Party Conference. A similar situation exists in relation to the selection of the National Executive Committee.

Within the overall party structure, therefore, the regional organisation of the Labour Party is something of an anomaly, isolated as it is from the party's higher representative assemblies. In practice, membership of Conference and the National Executive Committee does, on occasions, overlap with membership of a Regional Council Executive Committee, but there is no deliberate integration.

2. Functions of Regional and Area Councils

In the Conservative Party each Area Council Executive Committee in England and Wales has the following functions:

- (1) To promote, superintend, and carry through such work of organisation and political education within the Provincial Area as may be considered necessary.
- (2) To receive reports from the Provincial Area Advisory Committees and to take such steps thereon as may be deemed proper.
- (3) To advise the Executive Committee of the National Union.
- (4) To keep the Chairman of the Party Organisation in touch with the needs of every Constituency within the Provincial Area.
- (5) To obtain local views on public questions, and transmit them to Headquarters, or to Members of Parliament representing Constituencies within the Provincial Area.
- (6) To be a channel of inter-communication between the particular Constituencies within the Provincial Area for the purpose of rendering mutual assistance, and of arranging concerted action.
- (7) To administer the funds of the Provincial Area.
- (8) To appoint such Sub-Committees and to delegate to them such powers as may from time to time be considered necessary.

- (9) To summon the Provincial Area Council at such times as may be deemed necessary, and to draw up the Agenda for the Council Meetings.
- (10) To submit a Report of the acts and proceedings of the Committee at every ordinary meeting of the Provincial Area Council,
- (11) To frame By-laws for its own guidance, provided always that they are in accordance with the Rules of the National Union.(1)

Functions:

1. To organise and maintain in the Regional Area a Political Labour Party, and to ensure the establishment of a Central Labour Party in every Parliamentary Borough, with suitable constituency organisation in the separate constituencies of Divided Boroughs.
2. To co-operate with the National Executive Committee, the Central Council of the Trades Union Congress, the Co-operative Union Ltd., or other kindred Organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the Constitution and Standing Orders of the Labour Party and the Standing Orders of the Trades Union Congress.
3. To carry out the functions of the Federation of Labour Parties for the (five) counties within the Regional Area.
4. To provide such machinery as is deemed necessary to ensure a better co-ordination of Local Government Policy throughout the area.(2)

3. Organisation and Membership at the Regional and Area Level

The Council of each Conservative Party Provincial Area in England and Wales is constituted every year as follows:

- (1) The Officers of the Provincial Area, and the Officers of each County Organisation (if any) within the Provincial Area.
- (2) The Officers of each duly constituted and approved Provincial Area Advisory Committee.
- (3) The members of the Provincial Area Executive Committee and members of the Executive Committee of the National union representing the Provincial Area.

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1. Conservative Party Rules, Rule VIII.
 2. West Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party, Rules and Constitution. These functions also apply to the other two regions being examined.

- (4) Representatives of each Constituency Association within the Provincial Area....
- (5) Representatives of the Central Association for each Borough with two Constituency Associations.....
- (6) Representatives of the Central Association for each Borough with three or more Constituency Associations....
- (7) Not more than two representatives of each subscribing Organisation and Club within the Provincial Area.
- (8) Vice-Presidents and Honorary Members elected by the Provincial Area.
- (9) Four representatives of each University and College Conservative and Unionist Association within the Provincial Area.
- (10) The Conservative and Unionist Members of the House of Lords resident within the Provincial Area who are in receipt of the Party Whip.
- (11) The Conservative and Unionist Members of the House of Commons representing Constituencies within the Provincial Area, who are in receipt of the Party Whip.
- (12) The prospective Conservative and Unionist Candidates approved by the Standing Advisory Committee on Candidates and officially selected by Constituency Associations within the Provincial Area.
- (13) The Chairman of the National Union, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, and the Honorary Secretary of the National Union.
- (14) The Central Office Area Agents.(1)

In the Labour Party, the National Executive Committee's desire to integrate and co-ordinate the activities of the various affiliated units is reflected not only in the duties which Regional Councils are expected to fulfil, but also in the qualifications for Regional Council membership. There are five major groupings:

1. Constituency and Borough Parties, and Federations of Trades Councils recognised by the Trades Union Congress.
2. Area or district committees affiliated to the Trades Union Congress or recognised by the Trades Union Congress as bona fide Trade Unions.

-
1. Conservative Party Rules, Rule V.

3. Co-operative Societies or Organisations.
4. Socialist Societies affiliated to the Labour Party nationally.
5. Women's Councils.(1)

The number of delegates eligible to attend a Regional Council Annual Meeting varies in proportion to the membership and category of each affiliated unit. In 1970 Trade Unions could send one delegate per 1,000 members, while Constituency Labour Parties could send two delegates for each 1,000 or part thereof. The numbers eligible from Boroughs, Federations of Trades Councils, Co-operatives and Socialist Societies were fixed and stipulated in each Regional Council constitution.(2) In the East Midlands, for example, 290 delegates were appointed to attend the 1968 Regional Annual Conference, in the following proportions:

Trade Unions	154
Federations of Trades Councils	2
Borough and Constituency Labour Parties	107
Womens Advisory Councils	10
Co-operative Party	17
	<u>290</u>

In addition, the following ex-officio members were invited to attend:

Members of Parliament	27
Prospective Candidates	5 (3)

Potentially, in the three areas being examined in this thesis, the Area Councils have enormous memberships (for example, 1,200 in the North West). In practice, however, the level of attendance at the annual and half-yearly meetings rarely rises above 300, unless a high-ranking Cabinet or shadow minister is the main speaker.

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1. For example, East Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party, Constitution and Rules, p.1.
 2. For example, East Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party, Constitution and Rules, p.2.
 3. 1969 East Midlands Regional Council Annual Report, p.4.

The Constitution of each Provincial Area provides for an Area Executive Committee. This is something of a miniature area council, with representatives from constituencies, the Young Conservatives, Trade Unionists, and Women's Advisory Councils. In the North West there is greater representation at the Executive Committee level than in either the East Midlands or the West Midlands. This is because, in the North West, the Executive Committee is not the main business committee, as it is in the other two areas. In the North West Peers, M.P's and representatives of Conservative Clubs are able to sit on the Executive Committee. In the East Midlands there is no provision for representation on the Area Executive Committee for Peers or M.P's, but their constitution permits "co-opted members not exceeding five, one of whom shall be a Member of Parliament".(1)

Formally, the North West gives the impression of being more democratic at the area level than its counterparts in the East and West Midlands. Not only are more delegates afforded representation at Executive Committee level, but in the North West there is, in addition, a Finance and General Purposes Committee. This Committee is a business committee, managing the affairs of the provincial area between meetings of the Area Executive Committee. In 1969, for example, the North West Provincial Area Annual Report noted: "The Area Finance and General Purposes Committee has met eight times during the year and has undertaken the detailed planning for the Area's activities. In addition, it has considered and forwarded to the National Union many resolutions submitted by Constituency Associations".(2)

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1. Rules of the East Midlands Area Council. Revised May 1968.
 2. 1969 North West Provincial Area Annual Report.

The North West Finance and General Purposes Committee consists of:

1. The Officers of the Area.
2. The Chairman of each Area Committee (for example, Area Trade Union Committee or Area Advisory Committee on Education).
3. Twelve members of the Area Council (three from each of the four groups into which the Area is divided).
4. It may co-opt up to ten additional members.
5. The Committee shall at all times be so constituted that at least three men, three women and three Young Conservatives are among its members.(1)

The composition of the Regional Executive Committee in each region is similar. Each has thirty-four members, including fourteen trade union representatives. The remaining seats are allocated to constituency and Borough Parties and other affiliated groups, usually on an area basis. For example, in the East Midlands seats are allocated on the following basis:

- 14 seats to affiliated Trade Unions.
- 1 seat to the Central and Constituency Labour Parties in each of the county boroughs of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham.
- 2 seats to the County Constituency Labour Parties in each of the counties of Derby and Nottingham.
- 1 seat to the Constituency Labour Parties in Leicestershire.
- 3 seats to the Constituency Labour Parties in Lincolnshire.
- 2 seats to the Constituency Labour Parties in Northamptonshire.
- 4 seats to the Labour Party Women's Advisory Councils.
- 1 seat to the Parliamentary Labour Party (East Midlands Regional Group).
- 2 seats to the Federations of Trades Councils.(2)

These are elected separately. For example, trade union delegates at the Annual Meeting can only vote to select the trade union representatives; they cannot vote for any other section.

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1. Constitution and Rules of the North West Provincial Area.
 2. East Midlands Regional Council Constitution, p.3.

At the area level in the Conservative Party there is a series of advisory committees. The West Midlands Area, with the following committees, is typical: Area Women's Advisory Committee, Area Young Conservative Committee, Area Trade Union Committee, Area Conservative Political Centre Committee, Area Advisory Committee on Education, Area Local Government Committee.(1) All these committees are reproduced at the national level, where the membership consists very largely of representatives drawn from the respective area committees.

The Labour Party also has its sub-committees at the regional level. In 1970, for example, the North West Region had the following sub-committees: Organisation and Education, Local Government, Magisterial, Young Socialists. Unlike the Conservative Party, however, there is no national committee structure corresponding to that at the regional level. The regional sub-committees in the Labour Party are isolated organisationally.

1. Rules of the West Midlands Conservative Council, pp.9,10. Also, 1968-69 West Midlands Conservative Council Annual Report, p.1.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

To: Labour Party Regional Organisers:
Conservative Party Area Agents:

Full Name: Region/Area.....

Date of Birth: Place of Birth (Town).....

1. What type of school did you attend?

Elementary: ... Secondary: ... Grammar: ... Public:

2. At what age did you leave school?

3. Have you had any form of further education? Please specify:

.....
.....

4. Were your parents actively involved in work for the Party?

Yes/No If "Yes", please give details:

.....
.....

5. How old were you when you joined the Party?

6. What voluntary positions or offices did you hold in the Party at the local and constituency level before you went into the full-time agency service?

.....
.....

7. Have you ever served in the Armed Forces?

- a) in wartime Yes/No
- b) in peacetime Yes/No
- c) which service?
- d) between what years?
- e) what rank were you when you left the Service?

8. Leaving aside the Armed Forces, have you been employed in any full-time jobs outside the agency service, or has all your working life been spent as a full-time Party Organiser? Please specify any other jobs.

.....
.....
.....
.....

9. Are you a member of a trade union?
10. In what year did you first join the Agency Service in a full-time capacity?
11. Please list the constituencies in which you have served as a full-time agent. (With dates please)
-
-
-
-
-
-
12. Have you ever worked at Party Head Office?
- In what capacity?
- Between which years?
13. In what year did you become an Assistant Regional Organiser/ Deputy Central Office Area Agent?
- Year:
- Region:
14. In what year were you appointed Regional Organiser/Area Agent?
- Year:
15. Have you been Regional Organiser/Area Agent in more than one Region? Yes/No.
16. Which regions other than your present one? (Dates please)
-
-
-

January, 1971

David Wilson

APPENDIX C

PERSONNEL AT THE REGIONAL AND AREA LEVEL

Very little data is available on the origins, education and past careers of regional and area organisers. This appendix outlines the nature of their appointment, pay, promotion and mobility. It also examines the backgrounds of the organisers, bringing out the similarities and differences between the Labour and Conservative parties at this intermediate level.

(a) Appointment

In the Conservative Party the method of appointing area staff is essentially informal. The Party's Director of Organisation is the key figure. Through his area agents the Director keeps himself informed about possible candidates for promotion. In addition, the Director visits every area at least once a year to meet all the constituency association agents. He also attends every by-election, thereby coming into contact with constituency agents. When a vacancy occurs the Director, after consulting his area staff, invites a constituency agent to London and offers him the job of Deputy Central Office Area Agent. Technically, the relevant Area Chairman must approve the appointment, but this is always a formality. There are no appointment committees before which the candidate must appear. The process of selection provides a marked contrast with that in the Labour Party.

The method of appointment in the Labour Party is much more formal. When a vacancy occurs at either the assistant or the full regional organiser level the post is advertised. Applications are considered by a sub-committee of the National Executive Committee. As in the Conservative Party, there is a

defined career structure, namely, constituency agent assistant regional organiser, then regional organiser. Regional Council chairmen have no real role to play in the appointment of regional organisers.

(b) Salary Structure

The salary structure at the regional level differs markedly between the two parties. In 1971 the wage structure for Labour Party regional organisers ranged from £1,900 to £2,140 in two increments of £120. An assistant Labour Party regional organiser earned from £1,600 to £1,750 in two increments. In the Conservative Party the area agent's salary in 1971 was on a scale between £2,800 and £3,400. Seniority, and to a lesser extent size of area, are the main factors determining an area agent's point on the scale. In the Labour Party seniority is the sole criterion determining the level of pay, although considerable prestige is attached to being organiser in a large region.

Not only are the Conservative Party's basic salaries much more attractive than those of the Labour Party, but fringe benefits, notably mileage allowances, are also more favourable. In 1971 Conservative area agents were paid up to 3½p or 4p a mile, depending on the capacity of car engine. There was also a depreciation allowance of £130 per year. In the Labour Party, however, the depreciation allowance in 1971 was £50 and the petrol allowance only 2½p per mile. Both salaries and fringe benefits were, therefore, much better in the Conservative Party. A Deputy Central Office Area Agent received £2,600 to £2,900 a year in 1971, a far larger salary than that of a full regional organiser in the Labour Party.

(o) Promotion (1)

In the Labour Party the age range for entry into the agency service extended from 26 to 39, while in the Conservative Party the range was from 21 to 32. For how long, and in how many constituencies do these agents remain, before they are promoted to become either an assistant regional organiser or a deputy area agent? Tables 1 and 2 provide a comparative analysis.

Table 1

The Labour Party: Experience at the Constituency level

Number of Agencies	Total length of service
1	3
1	2
2	2
4	11
3	10
3	9
1	5
1	2
1	10
Average $1\frac{8}{9}$ agencies	6 years

Table 2

The Conservative Party: Experience at the Constituency level

Number of Agencies	Total length of service
3	8
1	6
2	5
3	10
2	7
3	13
2	10
3	10
4	15
Average $2\frac{5}{9}$	9½

1. The information contained in the remainder of Appendix C was obtained by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix B) sent out in 1971 by the author to the eleven regional organisers in the Labour Party and to the eleven Conservative area agents in England and Wales. Nine area agents and nine regional organisers replied to the questionnaire.

Those people who become Conservative Party area agents therefore receive a more thorough training at the constituency level than their counterparts in the Labour Party. The relative shortage of full-time agents in the Labour Party has meant earlier promotion than in the Conservative Party. It is interesting to compare the ages at which the respective constituency agents became deputy area agents or assistant regional organisers.

Table 3

Age at which Constituency Agents were promoted
to Deputy/Assistant Organisers (1)

Age	Labour	Conservative
25 - 30	2	-
30 - 35	-	2
35 - 40	3	3
40 - 45	4	2

Table 4 indicates how long these organisers spent as deputies before being promoted.

Table 4

Number of years spent at Deputy level

Years	Labour	Conservative
0	-	2
1	1	1
2	1	1
3	1	4
4	1	-
5	1	1
6	1	-
7	-	-
8	1	-
9	1	-
10	-	-
over 10	1	-
Average	6 years	22/9

1. Two of the nine Conservative Area Agents were provided directly to the position of Area Agents without having first been a Deputy.

Labour Party employees spent less time at the constituency level than their Conservative counterparts, but they spent over twice as long as assistants before being promoted. On average, Labour Party regional organisers spent 12 years between first entering the agency service and becoming a regional organiser, while Conservative area agents spent $11\frac{1}{2}$ years at the constituency and deputy levels before finally being appointed area agents.

Table 5 shows the age at which the current (1971) area and regional agents were appointed to their position, while Table 6 gives their age on 1st January 1971:

Table 5

Age of appointment to present position

Age	Labour	Conservative
35 - 40	-	3
40 - 45	4	6
45 - 50	4	-
50 - 55	1	-

Table 6

Age of Regional/Area Organisers, 1st January 1971

Age	Labour	Conservative
40 - 45	1	2
45 - 50	1	3
50 - 55	3	2
55 - 60	1	1
60 - 65	3	1

(d) Mobility

Labour Party regional organisers are not moved around the country in the same way as Conservative area agents. Only two of the nine Labour Party regional organisers who responded had served in more than one region. In the Conservative Party, on the other hand, five out of the nine respondents had worked in

more than one area. The two exceptions in the Labour Party had spent one year and five years respectively in their first region. The five agents in the Conservative Party who had worked in more than one area spent, on average, six years in their first. In January 1974 the Labour Party regional organisers had averaged over eight years in their current regions. The Conservative area agents had averaged eight and a half years in their current area.

(e) Background

The background of professional party organisers in Britain has attracted very little attention from political scientists. The questionnaire provided some interesting information concerning the origins, education, and past careers of regional organisers and area agents.

1. Education

Conservative area agents were at school longer than the Labour Party regional organisers:

Table 7

The School-leaving age of Regional Organisers and Area Agents

Age	Labour	Conservative
13	-	1
14	5	2
15	2	-
16	2	2
17	-	3
18	-	1

While Labour Party regional organisers left school earlier, the questionnaire indicated that they were far more ready to use further education facilities than Conservative area agents. Only two of the nine Labour Party organisers who responded had not received further education. This compares with six

Conservative area agents. Technical college education, along with some night school and correspondence course work, provided the staple diet for Labour Party organisers. The three Conservative Party area agents who obtained further education all trained for a professional qualification. Conservative area agents attended school longer and were therefore possibly less in need of further education than their colleagues in the Labour Party. Their differences reflect the different social backgrounds of the main parties. In many respects they are a microcosm of the social differences between the two parties.

2. Political Background

The ages at which regional organisers and area agents joined their parties varied. The range in the Labour Party was from 15 to 23, with an average joining age of about 18. In the Conservative Party the range was broader, stretching from 16 to 30. Here the average age for joining the party was higher, at 21. Labour Party regional organisers were more likely to have come from a politically active background. In the Labour Party the parents of five out of the nine respondents were involved in party work whereas the parents of only three Conservative area agents were so involved.

The political involvement of regional and area organisers in the work of their party before becoming full-time employees in the agency service is interesting. Here, a major difference between the two parties emerges. All nine Labour Party organisers were involved in party work at the constituency or local party level before entering the agency service. In the Conservative Party only three of the nine area agents were similarly involved. One could argue that in the Conservative Party the

agency service is far more of a career than it appears to be in the Labour Party. In the Labour Party, becoming an agent follows on from active voluntary involvement.

3. The Armed Forces

In the Labour Party only four of the nine organisers had served in the armed forces, two in wartime and two in peacetime. Their length of service varied from 3 to 7 years. In the Conservative Party, on the other hand, all nine area agents had been in the armed forces. Five had served in wartime only, while four had served in both wartime and peacetime. Their range of service extended from 3 to 14 years. In the Labour Party the average length of service was 5 years, compared with 6½ years in the Conservative Party.

Seven of the nine Conservative area agents had served in the Army, one in the Air Force, and one in the Navy. In the Labour Party two had served in the Army, one in the Air Force, and one in the Navy. In 1971 the Conservative area agent was, therefore, on average, an Army man with about 6½ years service. A Labour Party regional organiser was, in contrast, unlikely to have served in the armed forces. It is likely that he will have served in industry during the war years. The military pedigree of Conservative area agents was, thus, distinct from that of most of the regional organisers.

4. Outside Employment

There was no major distinction between the two parties in terms of work outside the agency service. All nine Labour Party organisers had been in employment outside the agency service, as had eight of the nine Conservative area agents. Most Labour Party regional organisers had a considerable amount of experience in industry before becoming full-time agents.

Indeed, the average age at which the nine Labour Party regional organisers included in the survey first entered the agency service was 32. The Conservative Party average age was considerably younger, at 26. Given that all Conservative area agents spent a period in the armed forces, it appears that they spent far less time in outside employment than their colleagues in the Labour Party. A profile of Labour Party regional organisers and Conservative Party area agents was presented in Chapter Three.

SOURCES

For convenience, the sources of this study are divided into three categories: (1) Primary Sources, (2) Interviews, (3) Bibliography.

The lists of Sources have been drawn up as follows:

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Regional

Local

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Minutes, East Midlands Regional Committee of the Young Socialists, 1966-1970.

LOCAL

A wide variety of local reports were referred to in this study, but few provided information on regional or area activity which could be utilised in the text. However, some were useful:

City of Manchester Conservative Association, Annual Report of the Central Executive Council, 1969-1970.

Birmingham Trades Council and Labour Party Annual Report, 1971.

Warwick and Leamington Conservative Constituency Association, Annual Report 1970.

Meridan Conservative Constituency Association, Annual Report, 1970.

Coventry Borough Labour Party, Annual Reports, 1970, 1971.

Newspaper archives, notably The Times and The Birmingham Post have been useful although there is little documentation on regional and area organisation. Relevant articles are referred to in the text.

(2) INTERVIEWS

(All the people listed below were interviewed at least once during the period 1969-1971.)

J. Birch, Chairman, North Western Area Conservative Political Centre Advisory Committee.

J. Bird, Secretary, Wolverhampton North East Constituency Labour Party.

G. Block, Librarian, Conservative Research Centre.

E. Blower (Mrs.), Agent, Meriden Labour Party.

J. Booler, Secretary, Ashfield Labour Party; Treasurer, East Midlands Regional Council of the Labour Party.

A. Bowen-Gotham, City Party Agent, Manchester Conservative Association.

G. Brown, M.P., Labour, Belper.

W. Burley, Assistant Regional Organiser, West Midlands.

P. Carnody, North West Regional Organiser of the Labour Party.

J. Carroll, Agent, Nottingham Central Labour Party.

J. Cattermole, East Midlands Regional Organiser of the Labour Party.

L.R. Chamberlain, West Midlands Regional Organiser of the Labour Party.

D. Cheetham, Secretary, Carlton Constituency Labour Party; Member of the East Midlands Regional Council Executive Committee.

G. Daly, Secretary, Coventry Borough Labour Party.

R. Delafield, Assistant General Secretary, Greater London Regional Council of the Labour Party.

M. Dolphin, Agent, Grimsby Labour Party.

S. Fraser, Secretary, Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party.

I. Freeman, City Party Secretary, Birmingham Conservative Association.

J. Galloway, West Midlands Conservative Party Area Agent.

J. Godfrey (Miss), Agent, Warwick and Leamington Conservative Association.

P.W. Goulding, Agent, Stockport North Conservative Association.

J. Greenwood, Conservative Research Department.

W.G. Hanlon, Deputy Central Office Agent, North Western Area (Liverpool).

R.G. Hayward, National Agent of the Labour Party.

E. Heffer, M.P., Labour, Walton.

K. Humphrey, Agent, Rushcliffe Constituency Labour Party.

D. Hunt, Labour Candidate, Bury and Radcliffe Constituency Party.

A. Johnson, Assistant Regional Organiser, North West.

C.C. Johnson, Treasurer, North West Area Council of the Conservative Party.

R. Knowles, Secretary, Birmingham Borough Labour Party.

P.K. Livingston, East Midlands Area Agent of the Conservative Party.

M. Long (Mrs.), Assistant Regional Organiser, East Midlands.

G.R. Mathews, Chairman, West Midlands Area Council.

R. Mellish, Labour M.P. Burntwood.

D. Merry, Assistant Regional Organiser, North West.

J. Minall, Secretary, Derbyshire South East Constituency Labour Party.

A. Nichols, Agent, Coventry North Conservative Association.

J. Pattinson, Agent, Rugby Constituency Labour Party.

D. Peel, Deputy Central Office Agent, West Midlands.

P. Price (Miss), Assistant Regional Organiser, East Midlands.

G. Richards, Member, Coventry Conservative Association.

D. Robertson, Agent, Nottingham South Constituency Labour Party; member of East Midlands Regional Council of Labour Party.

H. Rogers, (Miss), Conservative Agent, Meriden Constituency.

R. Simmons, Assistant Regional Organiser, East Midlands.

D. Simpson, Young Conservative Organiser, West Midlands.

G.B. Slack, Secretary, Stockport Borough Labour Party.

J. Starkey, Deputy Central Office Agent, West Midlands.

D. Stringer, Deputy Central Office Agent, West Midlands.

P. Stephenson, Chairman, North West Conservative Area Council.

J. Stuart-Cole, North Western Organiser, Co-operative Party; member of North Western Regional Council of Labour Party.

D. Taverne, M.P., Lincoln (Labour).

P. Thomas, Chairman, The Conservative Party.

R. Underhill, Assistant National Agent, The Labour Party.

N. Vann, Youth Officer, The Labour Party.

R. Wallis, formerly North Western Regional Organiser, The Labour Party.

E. Ward, Deputy Area Agent, East Midlands.

D. Warner, Coventry Borough Labour Party.

I. Wagner, Librarian, The Labour Party.

N.E. Webster, Agent, Cheshire Conservative Association.

R. Webster (Sir), Director of Organisation, The Conservative Party.

G. Whiting, Agent, Coventry South Conservative Association.

R. Williams, Administrative Officer, Transport House.

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