

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH IN ENGLAND 1918 - 1939: A  
STUDY OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS WITH PARTICULAR  
REFERENCE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF BURNLEY, HALIFAX, IPSWICH, AND LUTON.

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
University of Leeds.

1974

ABSTRACT

The thesis begins with a discussion of present views on the nature of the contrast between North and South in England. It proceeds to test those views against the experience of four English towns - Burnley, Halifax, Ipswich and Luton - between 1918 and 1939. Chapter Two examines the causes and extent of economic growth in the four towns, and devotes special attention to employment and factory construction. A discussion of industrial change in the four towns as individual entities comprises a major section of this chapter. Chapter Three discusses incomes. An attempt is made to establish the proportion of the population in each of the towns living in poverty. Account is taken of the impact of rent and union activities on incomes. Chapters Four, Five and Six analyse social conditions in the four towns. Chapter Four looks at changes in population, the role played by migration, compares the health of the towns, and concludes with a discussion of the development of the public health services. Chapter Five takes for its subject the provision of housing and the demolition of slums, and incorporates a note on town planning. In Chapter Six, the educational services are compared and special attention is given to the impact the depression had on their development. Chapter Seven reviews the financing of local government and compares the contributions made by the rates and by Central Government grants. Year-to-year management of local authority finance is surveyed, and the varying roles played by the Chairmen of the Finance Committees are considered. Chapter Eight examines local government, and isolates for special consideration movements in party support; the contrasting fortunes of the parties, and especially the rise of Labour and the decline of the Liberals; changes in the social composition of councils; the role of clubs, societies and religious organisations; and the contribution these factors made to the quality of local government, and to the interest the public showed in municipal elections. Chapter Nine

looks into the relationship between councils and the business organisations they controlled, with special reference to the transport systems, which underwent a crisis in this period. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relations between chairmen and local government officials. Chapter Ten presents the main findings of the thesis, and sums up the factors responsible for these conclusions.

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PREFACE

In preparing this thesis I have received great assistance from the staffs of a large number of libraries, who have devoted many hours to the tracing of materials. I also owe a considerable debt to numerous officials of companies, local government departments, and social organisations, and to many private persons, who have given up their time to answer my enquiries about detailed aspects of life in their localities. Individual correspondents are too numerous to list here, but I should like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my gratitude to them for the patience and understanding with which they have responded to my requests.

I also owe a particular debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Professor A.J. Taylor, who has devoted much care and attention to this thesis, and from whose advice I have greatly benefitted.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to examine the North - South relationship in England between 1919 and 1939 by comparing economic, social and political developments in four English towns, two in the North (Burnley and Halifax) and two in the South (Luton and Ipswich).

The divide between North and South has attracted a great deal of attention during the last two decades. One writer has claimed that the view that "over the past few years two Englands have taken shape, one in the North the other in the South, unequal socially and economically" has become "our major domestic preoccupation".<sup>1</sup> Although there are many opinions about the nature of the North - South relationship, and still more views as to what constitutes the "essence" of Northernness or Southernness, studies which attempt to quantify the regional gap have been much rarer. Factual evidence is meagre.

This is all the more surprising in view of the fact that the North - South "problem"<sup>2</sup> has a very long history. Some authorities have traced it back as far as the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> It is possible, however, to discern two main periods when the North - South relationship was transformed: the first, which began with the Industrial Revolution, made the North industrially supreme; the second, commencing at the end of the First World War, saw the South regaining its old supremacy, and the North becoming increasingly a disadvantaged region. This second development still continues.

It was during the first of these periods of crisis that many authorities formulated concepts of the difference between North and South which remain current today. Two Victorian novelists, attempting to analyse the "Condition of England Question", portrayed the

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1. G.Moorhouse, Britain in the Sixties: The Other England (1964) p. 13.

2. D.Read, The English Provinces c. 1760-1960. A Study in Influence (1964), p. 275.

depth of the mutual misunderstanding between inhabitants of the two regions. In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell confronts a Southern clergyman's daughter and a Northern millowner, and each is made to express his view of the other's "country". Thornton, the Darkshire (Lancashire) entrepreneur, declares "I would rather be a man toiling, suffering - nay, failing and unsuccessful - here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease." Margaret Hale, the Southerner, reacts in a way "that brought the colour into her cheeks and the angry tears into her eyes ... 'You are mistaken ... if there is less adventure or less progress ... there is less suffering also. I see men ... going about in the streets [in the North] who look ground down by some pinching sorrow or care - who are not only sufferers but haters. Now, in the South we have our poor, but there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here.'" Margaret concludes "'you do not know the South'", whilst Thornton in his turn remarks "'and may I say you do not know the North?'"<sup>1</sup>

In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell sought to explain operative and millowner, Northerner and Southerner, to one another and to the reader, with the aim of reconciling the differences between them. Charlotte Brontë, however, was more partisan. In Shirley, a Yorkshire girl, Caroline Helstone, and a Southern curate, Donne, converse. The latter seeks to ingratiate himself with Caroline by "abuse ... of the natives of Yorkshire ... complaints of the want of high society; of the backward state of civilisation in these districts; murmurings against the disrespectful conduct of the lower orders in the north toward their betters; silly ridicule of the

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1. Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South (Penguin Books edn., 1970), pp.122-123.

manner of living in these parts, - the want of style, the absence of elegance." Unfortunately, Donne has misjudged his audience. Caroline "hated to hear Yorkshire abused ... and when brought up to a certain pitch, ... would turn and say something of which neither the matter nor the manner recommended her to Mr. Donne's good-will."<sup>1</sup>

It was Charlotte's sister, Emily, however, who expressed a view of Northerners that has persisted up to the present day, when, in Wuthering Heights, Lockwood, a Southerner, remarks of people living in the wilder parts of Yorkshire: "they do live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface change, and frivolous external things. I could fancy a love for life here almost possible; and I was a fixed unbeliever in any love of a year's standing."<sup>2</sup>

The idea that life in the North was more "in earnest" was developed by many commentators writing after the First World War. Even so careful a writer as J.B. Priestley refers to "the Lancastrians as people worth considering as people, real folk" unlike "the vapouring creatures from the South Country."<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, he defines the qualities of Lancashire people as "shrewdness, homely simplicity, irony, fierce independence, [and] an impish delight in mocking whatever is thought to be affected and pretentious."<sup>4</sup> Presumably, one of the objects of Lancashire mockery is that part of England, which, in the same work, Priestley has described as "the whole affected tittering South Country."<sup>5</sup> These Northern and Southern stereotypes have continued to have currency. Alan Sillitoe, in his introduction to Arnold Bennett's The Old Wives' Tale argues that "when a man

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1. Charlotte Brontë, Shirley (Everyman edn., 1969), p.90.

2. Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights (Penguin edn., 1964), p.65.

3. J.B. Priestley, English Journey (Collected Edition, 1949), p.254.

4. Ibid., p.253.

5. Ibid., p.168.



beats a retreat from it [i.e. the North] he has to pay it homage for the rest of his life for letting him go, but a tax must also be paid to that part of the southern world which has accepted him. Thrust out of his own environment by a socially-impaired character, he has to make a go of it in order to survive spiritually in so strange a place as London and the south. Its softness is destructive and has to be fought by a mad kind of industry."<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Tynan describes the advantages to some artists of a migration to the North: for example, Joan Littlewood "came back to England and migrated to the industrial centres of the north, which she found more congenial than the softer, less militant south."<sup>2</sup> The dislike Northerners have for the South is, according to some commentators, both widespread and strong. G. Turner, in The North Country states that "all over the North, I came accross instances of the powerful animus which the South or Southern attitudes provoked<sup>3</sup> ... one of the best of the younger Northern novelists told me he always thought of the North as masculine and the South as feminine<sup>4</sup> ... perhaps with some justification, men from the North have always tended to think of themselves as tougher and more virile than the average Southerner."<sup>5</sup>

It is hardly surprising that, presented with a view of themselves as "soft", "feminine", less "real", and of those who migrate to the South from the North as "socially impaired", the Southerners have reacted strongly. George Orwell, never one to accept anybody's pretensions lightly, has given his own view of the quality of Northernness. He writes "there exists in England a curious cult of Northernness, sort of Northern snobbishness. A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know

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1. Arnold Bennett, The Old Wives' Tale (Pan Books edn., 1964), Introduction by Alan Sillitoe, p.19.

2. Kenneth Tynan, Tynan Right and Left (1967), p.320

3. G. Turner, The North Country (1967), p.13.

4. Ibid., p.34.

5. Ibid., p.33.

that he regards you as an inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain that it is only in the North that life is 'real' life, that the industrial work done in the North is the only 'real' work, that the North is inhabited by 'real' people, the South merely by rentiers and their parasites. The Northerner has 'grit', he is grim, 'dour', plucky, warm-hearted, and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate, and lazy - that at any rate is the theory."<sup>1</sup> Orwell argues that all claims for superiority, such as those of the Northerner, are spurious, but also are important, because people believe in them.<sup>2</sup>

Other commentators have reacted more sharply against the image some Northerners have of themselves. Two examples chosen from several appearing in the national newspapers during 1971 illustrate this. The Times television critic complained that "there is a lot of milage (sic) still left in the extraordinary idea that life is in every way more real in the North of England than in the South; but not just in any part of the North - specifically in that small area from which the playwright, columnist, novelist or poet who is currently attempting to reinforce this notion happens to come himself ... we were treated to yet another of those conversations set among swooping grasslands, under limitless skies, about the horrors of living 'down there' ... What [none of the Northern writers] seemed aware of was that their own lives bear as little resemblance to those of the workers around them as they do to those of the workers in the supposedly soft cities of the South. Contrary to the apparent beliefs of the 'North is tough, North is true' brigade, there is really nothing more intrinsically 'real' in working down a Yorkshire pit than there is in working down a Chelsea sewer."<sup>3</sup> One letter writer to The Sunday Times was unable to tolerate

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1. George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (Penguin Books edn., 1962) p.98.

2. Ibid., p.100.

3. The Times, November 1, 1971, p. 10.

the pretensions of Northerners: "Northerners are obsessed with themselves, the North and the state of being Northerners. They are jealous of the greater polish and wider outlook of Southerners, but are not prepared to work to achieve the same results, taking refuge instead in envious denigration of the latter as they themselves doggedly remain as parochial and megalomaniac as ever." She complained of the "deliberate rudeness and hostility met by Southern emigres to the North (who rarely stay) ... such behaviour ... is typical of a species that is different, largely through its own unfortunate efforts."<sup>1</sup>

The 'debate' thus continues. The bitterness of the arguments indicates how strong and deep provincial loyalties and antagonisms run. The origin of the images of Northerner and Southerner is difficult to determine, and perhaps much of the explanation lies outside the field of the historian and in that of the sociologist or the social anthropologist. However, in one respect it is possible for the historian to explain the hostility of North for South, and vice versa: that is, in the differing economic and social experience the people of the two regions have endured since industrialisation (and perhaps even before it). The nature of the work, the ugliness of much of the environment, and the rigour of the climate, convinced Northerners that only great toughness and resilience enabled them to survive. Sir Philip Gibbs wrote of the importance of this factor in the mid-1930's: "I was aware up north of a different atmosphere ... a different spirit. That phrase 'the front line trenches' stuck in my mind. It's true. The battle-line was up here. We in the south, in counties like Surrey and Sussex, are hardly aware of conditions in Northumberland and Durham and

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1. The Sunday Times, December 5, 1971, p. 14.

Yorkshire. It is a different world. Men and women lead different lives, harder, grimmer, closer to the firing line, and with the effects of this industrial war visible about them."<sup>1</sup> Added to this 'front line' attitude was a feeling on the part of many Northerners that their struggles were not appreciated in the South, that, indeed, they were despised on the grounds of accent and class. Donald Read has noted the importance of accent in the North-South problem: he argues that it has produced "serious cleavage and tension in English society ... during the present century."<sup>2</sup> The significance of class has been stressed by several commentators: for example, Anthony Sampson has written of the struggles within the Labour party in the early 1960's that "the antipathy between Wilson and Gaitskell was not just about tastes; it reflected the divide between north and south, between two classes and two nations."<sup>3</sup>

This discussion invites several questions about the gap between North and South. How far is it true to say that the origins of the "two nations" lie in a harsher economic history in the North? How far were Northerners disadvantaged in health services, provision for education, and housing during the interwar period? To what extent was poverty more widespread in the North than in the South?

There do not appear to be any surveys of these problems for the period between 1918 and 1939, though since the war, more inquiries have been made, and two of these in particular have a bearing on this thesis. The conclusions these studies come to do not entirely bear one another out. G.Taylor and N.Ayres in Born and bred unequal have made several general statements which imply a

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1. Philip Gibbs, England Speaks (1935), p.387.

2. D.Read, op. cit., p.275.

3. A.Sampson, Anatomy of Britain Today (1965), p.93.

North-South gap in the period in which they wrote (i.e. in the mid 1960's.) These are concerned with earnings, the quality of the health services, and housing. Taylor and Ayres have argued that "a body of evidence exists which indicates that the average family in the Northern region is more impoverished than elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> Further, that "in the Northern region, earnings and personal incomes are low, families tend to be large and unemployment is above average."<sup>2</sup> However, this view is based on the highly questionable hypothesis that there is "little alternative employment to mining and heavy industry in northern areas."<sup>3</sup> As regards housing and health services, Taylor and Ayres state that the former constitutes "the major environmental problem of the North Western region"<sup>4</sup> and that the latter "are insufficient".<sup>4</sup> Their most important conclusions are reserved, however, for education, and because education is a major area of study in this thesis, it is useful to quote them at length. They state that "in the second half of the twentieth century, two nations are growing up.. One is of children living in new or expanding areas with ... well equipped and well staffed schools. The other nation consists of generations of children conditioned by obsolete and inefficient schools; they are children who come from homes whose standards and environment are as deplorable as those of their schools. That the two nations can and do coexist within a short distance of one another is certain. What is significant and alarming for the future of our society is the concentration in large areas, principally located in the three northern regions, of children so handicapped in comparison with more fortunate children elsewhere that the majority will fail to achieve their potential intellectual and aesthetic development. It cannot be doubted that the marked

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1.G.Taylor and N.Ayres, Born and bred unequal (1969), p.51.

2. Ibid., p.122.

3. Ibid., p.14.

4. Ibid., p.122.

regional differentiation in the provision of new schools is increasing the gap between the two nations."<sup>1</sup>

A second study, Regional Variations in Britain by B.E.Coates and E.M.Rawstron, takes a much broader field to survey, and its conclusions are much less definitely in favour of an advantaged South as compared with a disadvantaged North. On the one hand, the authors have found that for the period since 1949, "the south-east is a favoured area in many respects and its 'magnetic' field of influence upon people is stronger than that of other parts of the United Kingdom."<sup>2</sup> They argue that the "ladder of incomes in the south-east has fewer landings and obstacles hampering a quick ascent than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Furthermore ... there is less chance of poverty in much of both the Midlands and the south-east than elsewhere."<sup>3</sup> However, they have also found that "the south-east is not by any means favoured either in all things social and economic, or evenly among its parts ... health services and education yield more mosaic maps than do the other topics."<sup>4</sup> They instance the absence of a clear regional pattern amongst such aspects of the social services as the availability of places in mental hospitals, the list size of general practitioners, the quality of the school medical service, and the provision of facilities for the educationally sub-normal.<sup>4</sup> They conclude that these examples - the majority of them based on data produced during the 1960's - "indicate the great and rather haphazard spatial variety that exists in at least two aspects of the social geography of Britain [health and education] seemingly quite unrelated to the marked south-easterly trends noted earlier."<sup>5</sup> Further, they assert that "although one may speak with considerable justification of the

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1. G.Taylor and N.Ayres, op. cit., p.79.

2. B.E.Coates and E.M.Rawstron, Regional Variations in Britain. Studies in Economic and Social Geography (1971), p.281.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

4. *Ibid.*, p.287.

5. *Ibid.*, p.287-8.

existence of a ridge of high incomes and opportunity for jobs that stretches from Surrey and Essex into the Midlands, one must remember that the patterns of social facilities do not follow the same trend."<sup>1</sup>

Both the above studies deal with the situation as it has developed since 1949. There are no comparable researches on the period before that, though there are ample opinions, such as that of Walter Greenwood: "take Lancashire and all it stands for from Britain and at once we become an unimportant storm-bound island lost in the mists of the north."<sup>2</sup> Several authorities have touched peripherally on the North-South relationship in the interwar period, and nearly all of them imply that the South was more favourably endowed than the North. Education, housing and health are selected for particular attention. Taylor and Ayres relate educational inequality to the industrial age of a locality<sup>3</sup>; M.P.Fogarty, writing of the Lancashire cotton towns, suggests that "one genuine disadvantage" they had was the "poor quality of housing and social amenities"<sup>4</sup>; D.Read states that the "average housing standards in many of the older industrial districts of the North are much inferior to those of the newer towns and suburbs of the South."<sup>5</sup> M.Penelope Hall has written that the distribution of general practitioners "was in no way related to the needs of their services, so that, for instance, just before the war Hastings had one general practitioner for every 1,178 persons, in South Shields there was one for every 4,105."<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that other commentators have used very similar statistics which also appear to show the North in a poor light. R.M.Titmuss has noted that "before 1939 there were, for example, proportionately seven times as many general

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1. B.E.Coates and E.M.Rawstron, op. cit., p.289.

2. Walter Greenwood, Lancashire (1951), p. 1.

3. G.Taylor and N.Ayres, op. cit., p.128.

4. M.P.Fogarty, Prospects of the Industrial Areas of Great Britain (1945), p. 225.

5. D.Read, op. cit., p.274.

6. M.Penelope Hall, The Social Services of Modern England (1952), p.57.

practitioners in Kensington as in South Shields"<sup>1</sup>, and H.Eckstein repeats the same figures: "Kensington had seven times as many doctors per unit of population as South Shields".<sup>2</sup>

The general impression is of an advantaged South and a disadvantaged North. As D. Read has written, "by 1912 the balance between North and South was already tilting in favour of the latter. This tendency was much accelerated during the following twenty-five years by the inter-war depression in the basic industries of the North."<sup>3</sup> S.G.Checkland has developed a theory of the relationship between economic progress and urban development, and has related it specifically to the interwar period. He writes, "if the economy of the city is thriving, incomes and employment are rising, tax revenues are high, city amenity continuously improves, crime and indigence are moderate, the atmosphere of the place brings new enterprises, shopping, and general service facilities are good, school teachers are plentiful so that classes are small and the stresses of classroom are less. Conversely, if the economic base of the town is failing, there will be high unemployment, low incomes, poor housing, obsolescence running ahead of renewal, social deterioration, high crime rates, a bad educational situation, new enterprises will go elsewhere. The politics of the city will relate to these two conditions. In the phase of decline there will almost certainly in a British city be a Labour council, concerned, quite naturally, with social amelioration rather than with economic growth. It will be largely elected by the denizens of the decayed inner ring (unless they have been strategically dispersed in peripheral housing estates). The middle class will increasingly opt out of the life of the city, taking their homes to independent

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1. R.M.Titmuss, Problems of Social Policy (1950), p.71.

2. H.Eckstein, The English Health Service (1958), p.61.

3. D.Read, op. cit., p. 272.



suburbs and sending their children to independent schools; perhaps they will do this even when there is prosperity. As Professor Court has said of Britain in the inter-war years, 'The sociology of a country in which the observer could pass within the day from the men without work of the stricken mining towns of County Durham to the life of the new featureless suburbs of a thriving engineering centre like Birmingham was strange.'"<sup>1</sup>

The above argument adds an important theory of urban change to the empirical data already assembled to suggest that the North was steadily falling behind the South during the interwar period.

The purpose of this thesis is to attempt to examine the balance between North and South, to see how far it tilted between 1918 and 1939, and in favour of which region. Two approaches may be made to a study of the North-South relationship. The first is to take one aspect of social, political or economic life - for example, the growth of local Labour parties, the quality of medical attention, or the size of classes in elementary schools - and to see how far divergences had appeared between the regions. This method presents a fairly complete picture of the North-South balance in one important respect. However, it does not take into account other aspects of life in the localities which may have an essential bearing on the variable under study. As Professor Checkland has pointed out, an entire series of aspects of life in a town are inter-dependent. To obtain a representation of the quality of life in North or South, as wide a range of variables as possible should be studied. The disadvantage of an enquiry of this type is that it can only take a very limited number of

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1. The Study of Urban History, ed. H.J.Dyos (1968), p.353.

towns if it is to cover each of them in some depth, which implies that such a thesis cannot propose to make definitive statements about the North-South relationship, but can only do so about the differences and similarities between two Northern and two Southern towns. However, these do provide a beginning for a more widespread study of the balance between North and South.<sup>1</sup>

Even in a study that is devoted to only four towns, much selection of material is inevitable: many sectors of urban life are either excluded altogether, or are treated only peripherally, e.g. the supply of water, drainage and sewerage; the development of fire services, and the growth of police forces. The criteria for selection of topics for study have been that they should have preoccupied contemporaries, that they should in retrospect be seen to have been crucial problems of the town in the interwar period, and finally that adequate materials for comparison should be available.

The problems which have been chosen for study are consequently: the nature and pace of industrial growth; the opportunities for employment and the extent of poverty; education, health, population change, and housing; the financing of local government; the development of public services (particularly those concerned with power and transport); and finally, the condition of local politics. The problems associated with the provision of water supply, sewerage and drainage, law and order, and the development of fire services were largely those of the Victorian city and as far as these four towns were concerned had to a considerable extent been solved by the start of the interwar period.

Boroughs have been chosen as the vehicle for the study because substantial quantities of information are available on a borough basis, and because no other unit of local government

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1. It will be noted that although the thesis cannot make final statements about the contrast between North and South, the terms "North" and "South" are used when discussing the comparison of Burnley and Halifax with Ipswich and Luton. The reason is that these terms are used merely as a convenient shorthand to avoid tedious repetition of the names of the towns.

provides so suitable a mode for comparison. Urban and Rural District Councils are generally too small and have insufficient control over their own affairs, whilst counties vary too much in size to provide a valuable North-South contrast. A problem deriving from the nature of these boroughs has emerged which must be explained. Luton, though a County Borough in the late 1960's, was a Municipal Borough before 1939, and consequently had fewer powers than the other three towns. Responsibilities, in education in particular, were shared with Bedfordshire County Council, and the division between the two authorities had the consequence that both were inclined to shirk their commitments. This factor does not, however, substantially modify the case argued about Luton council, which, even when it had total control over a service, tended to use its powers unaggressively.

The criteria for selecting towns for study were very broad: firstly, they should not be too dependent on or involved with a major Northern city such as Manchester or Leeds, or in the case of the Southern towns, too close to London. Secondly, they should be of approximately the same size - with populations between 75,000 and 100,000. Thirdly, they should be mainly industrial; not resorts, nor residential or university towns. Fourthly, they should not have suffered the extremes of good or bad fortune during the interwar period - for this reason, towns like Jarrow, Stockton, and Wigan were excluded. The towns should be reasonably representative of their respective regions.

In this discussion, the nature of local government assumes great importance. As has been stated above, municipal authorities retained a considerable measure of autonomy during this period,

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and had much wider powers than they have come to possess in the early 1970's. The quality of local government has been the target for criticism, often of a destructive kind.<sup>1</sup> It is not the central point of study in this thesis, but it may be stated here that as far as three of these towns were concerned, council meetings did not provide "material for comedy"<sup>1</sup>, and able councillors were not "scarce".<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the inadequacies of Luton Council were partly a function of its inferior status: where local government offered the possibility of real power, men with ability and initiative emerged to operate it.

This thesis is organised in the following way: chapters two and three study economic growth, employment, and income levels. They seek to explain why the Southern towns grew faster than the Northern ones, and why this faster growth was not translated into a sharp regional income gap. It will be argued that although money wages were higher in Luton and Ipswich, other factors - principally rent - reduced the real difference to one that was comparatively slight. Although highly paid groups were appearing amongst the Southern workers (such as the Luton car workers), these remained a minority. Families of men earning about £2.10s. a week in Luton in 1938 had often real incomes no higher than those of men receiving £1.18s. dole money in Burnley. The central point is not that the average Northerner was well off, he was not: it is that many Southerners remained poor. Poverty was still widespread, even in the late 1930's: many workers, in Luton and Ipswich as in Burnley and Halifax, earned little more, and often less, than the amount one of the leading authorities<sup>2</sup> suggested was the minimum on which people could live. This is not to disguise the fact that before 1933,

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1.e.g. E.L.Hasluck, Local Government in England (1936), pp. 50-51.

2. B.Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty and Progress. A Second Social Survey of York (1941), p.456.

unemployment was a more serious problem in the North, and was endemic in Burnley throughout the period. The appalling plight of the unemployed was the major social problem of the interwar years, and it remained unsolved, but it was nonetheless one of the paradoxes of this period that a man could be unemployed and still have an income equal to that of a man who was in full time work.

Chapter Four, Population Change and Public Health, is divided into two parts: the first deals with the contrast that occurred in the natural increase of population, and in rates of migration, which had an important effect in redistributing population between the two regions. Both Northern towns lost population, as many migrants were moving, not only to the South, but also to the pleasanter rural districts around both towns, and this was a process that had got underway in the decade before 1914. Between 1901 and 1939, the population of Burnley fell by 12% and that of Halifax by 8%. This was not an entirely disadvantageous process - both towns suffered from overcrowding in houses and schools and the redistribution of population reduced the dimensions of both problems. Much more serious difficulties were created by migration into Luton and Ipswich: between 1901 and 1939, the population of the former rose by 180% and of the latter by 50%. These rates of growth were almost as fast as those experienced by the great Victorian cities in the middle years of the 19th. century. They exacerbated many social problems: there were acute shortages of houses, schools and hospitals, and whilst there was enormous pressure to build them, there was equal pressure to keep expenditure down from businessmen and councillors who argued that rate increases would endanger prosperity. This dilemma was

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not satisfactorily solved by either Southern council during the interwar period.

From the fact that real incomes did not vary greatly from one town to another, several consequences followed. Southern local authorities were as reluctant to raise the rates as Northern councils were, so that Northern services were not more starved of money than the Southern. Chapters Four, Five, and Six consider developments in three of the social services: health, housing, and education. As regards health and housing it is necessary to distinguish two separate problems. Firstly, the fundamental situation in the North was worse than in the South, and it remained so throughout. Northerners were unhealthier, mortality rates - particularly for infants and mothers - were higher in Burnley and Halifax. Natural factors such as climate, and a longer history of industrialisation played major roles in bringing about this situation, and there was little that local government could do about either. Earlier industrialisation was also responsible for the poorer stock of housing that the Northern towns possessed. Houses in Burnley and Halifax were older, badly built, smaller, and needed replacing sooner.

The second problem concerns the action councils took to deal with the situation that confronted them. As regards health, the Northern councils were more vigorous at least partly because they had to be: the situation at the end of the First World War was appalling. Their efforts closed much of the gap in mortality rates that had existed in 1919 between North and South.

In housing, the problem itself was different from one region to the other, and this makes comparison much more difficult.

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The Northern councils needed to replace a mass of defective houses: slum clearance was a priority. The Southern councils had to expand the housing stock to provide homes for the increasing number of private families and migrants. The provision of council housing was inevitably an expensive process and all four councils faced pressure from some councillors to keep their commitments to a minimum, but only Luton Council succumbed. The implementation of housing programmes was amongst the major achievements of the other three councils during this period.

Pressure to economise was much stronger in education. This was everywhere regarded by many councillors as a luxury service, and was invariably the first candidate for economies. It was all the more important that this pressure be resisted in the North because education had been neglected there before 1914, and secondary schooling in particular had been starved of money and attention. Emphasis had traditionally been placed on relating education to the needs of industry, and this policy had resulted in the concentration of resources on technical schooling. By 1939, great changes had occurred, and the industrial depression was largely responsible for them. Technical education suffered an eclipse for much of the period. The depression played a major part in transforming the attitude of many of the Northern working class to secondary education from antipathy to a belief that sound secondary schooling offered an escape route from the impact of unemployment. This change of attitude was paralleled closely by a similar one amongst Labour parties in the North. By 1939, the regional gap in education had vanished.

Two factors were of major importance in enabling Northern

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councils to develop their social services to Southern levels. Firstly, a regional gap in the financing of councils was very slow to appear. Chapter seven seeks to explain why this was so, and points to the importance of the tighter committee structure in the North, the role of central government grants, the derating of industry, and the narrowness of the income gap for much of the period between most Northerners and Southerners.

Secondly, local political life was more vigorous in the North. The explanation of this is the subject of Chapter eight. Special attention is given to the thriving club and social life there, the pull of religion, the survival of independant Liberalism, and the earlier acceptance of the Labour party in Burnley and Halifax into the local political structures. The rise of the Labour party will be a major theme. Although the party in Luton attracted support more slowly than it did in the other three towns, by the end of the period Labour was winning as high a <sup>P</sup>ro<sub>l</sub>portion of votes in the South as it did in the North.

Councils in the North remained very much at the centre of local life, and both were shock absorbers for discontent. It was Luton Town Hall that was burnt down in a riot, not that of Burnley or Halifax. A strong sense of community prevailed in the Northern towns that was created by isolation and the grim existence Northerners had endured since the Industrial Revolution. The Southern towns were newer, there were no natural barriers to cut them off from the rest of the country and the experience of living in both of them, was, in terms of climate, terrain, atmospheric pollution etc., considerably less harsh. In an

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age of rapidly improving communications, London exercised an increasingly powerful attraction for many people in both towns. To Northerners, on the other hand, London seemed remote and often unsympathetic.

One of the greatest challenges local authorities faced during this period concerned the management of their trading companies. In this field, which is the subject of Chapter nine, one of the greatest North-South contrasts occurred. This had two aspects: firstly, the Northern councils had municipalised many of the utilities during the 19th century, so that after 1918, they found that they owned over-developed Victorian systems of gasworks and tramways. The Southern councils municipalised later and on a smaller scale: both owned electricity works but not gas, and possessed tramways that were on a much smaller scale than in the North. Consequently Southern councils had less serious problems of reorganisation than the Northern ones. Burnley and Halifax Councils faced the need to modernise their trading services in the same way that local industries needed to transfer to new types of product. Because these problems were discussed publicly, it is possible to make a close study of the extent to which Northerners were willing to modernise.

One difficulty which has emerged from this survey of the way local authorities operated concerns the materials that are available for research. This looms so large that a brief outline of the problems must be given.<sup>1</sup> Records vary enormously in quality and quantity both from town to town and from topic to topic. The amount of material that is available for some areas is immense, for others it is non-existent. Many records have been

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1. Detailed difficulties about evidence will be explained during the course of the thesis as these arise.

lost or mislaid. Local authorities and libraries are under constant pressure from lack of space, and many key materials have been destroyed because there has been nowhere to store them. The records of some of the Boards of Guardians have been one casualty in this respect, and account books of corporation finances another. A similar problem has emerged when attempts have been made to examine the records of individual industrial concerns.

Secondly, the researcher is at the mercy of the past indifference of local officials for assembling materials. Even with so basic a source as the council minutes, there are substantial variations from town to town. Only those produced by Ipswich council give verbatim reports of council meetings; the others merely list the decisions that resulted from council debates, and do not show how these were arrived at. Fortunately, the local newspapers of Halifax, Burnley, and Luton provided very full coverage of council meetings, which may be used to supplement the minutes.

Finally, records assembled by central government are available to reinforce local materials, but these also present difficulties. Centrally collected statistics were often produced irregularly, or infrequently. Very few of them cover the entire period. A Census was not taken in 1941, which is a severe handicap. The situation with regard to education illustrates the difficulties that arose in most departments. Several annual Board of Education lists became biennial following the Geddes economies in 1921. Others appeared at intervals of three, five, or even ten years. In these cases, statisticians did not always

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use the same categories as on the previous occasions so that data is not always strictly comparable. Much information which would be extremely useful for regional comparisons, such as subjects taught in schools; size of grants for University, and the number awarded; facilities available in grammar schools etc., was never assembled during this period.

This thesis adopts a thematic approach to the study of the problems of these four towns, comparing developments in health, for example, in all of them, before proceeding to a comparison of housing. It is important, however, that the chronology of events in the towns individually should not be lost sight of, so it is proposed to provide at this point a brief introduction to each of the towns, indicating developments upto the end of the Great War, followed by a summary of the course of events from 1918 to 1939.

#### BURNLEY

Burnley is situated in the north western part of Lancashire, on the river Brun, 27 miles north of Manchester. This was a remote part of the county: hills cut the town off from its neighbours, and geographical situation explains much of the town's history. The strong sense of community, reflected in the intense interest in local politics, was one result, and the difficulty the town had in attracting new industries was another. Burnley remained over-reliant on the cotton industry, and one of the two other major industries - textile engineering - remained very dependent on its prosperity. Coal mining constituted the third major source of employment. The great majority of textile and engineering firms were very small and privately owned. Both

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industries relied heavily on overseas trade, but during the Great War, exports had sharply declined, giving foreign competitors, especially Japanese and Indian, the opportunity to move into many of Lancashire's markets.

Burnley's long industrial history had had adverse social consequences: to judge by its infant and maternal mortality rates it was one of the unhealthiest towns in England. The need to house a rapidly growing population was met "by building tenement houses, back to back houses and cellar dwellings with little regard to sanitation, comfort and privacy."<sup>1</sup> H.M.Hyndman wrote: "a beautiful valley has been completely spoiled by one of the most ungainly and smoky manufacturing towns which it is possible to set eyes upon ... Here, if anywhere, the antagonism between the toilers and the spoilers must surely ... make itself felt."<sup>2</sup> Politically, the town was radical: in 1893 - 4, the Burnley S.D.F. had 1,100 members<sup>2</sup>, built up by an energetic local Socialist, Dan Irving. H.M.Hyndman was several times candidate for the parliamentary seat and came near to winning it. Political radicalism was associated with a vigorous trades union movement: in 1913, the Weavers Association had 30,000 members - not far off one in three of the town's population.<sup>3</sup> The Liberal party was also strong in the borough, and the doctrine of civic pride was practised: municipal control had been extended to gas, water, electricity, and tramways before 1914. The town's religious organisations were strong: a healthy Non-conformity sustained the Liberal party, whilst substantial Irish immigration to the town during the 19th. century had resulted in approximately 13% of the population being Roman Catholic in the late 1920's.<sup>4</sup> The churches had provided much of

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1. The County Borough of Burnley, Official Handbook Centenary Issue (undated, c. 1961), p. 49.

2. C. Tsuzuki, H.M.Hyndman and British Socialism (1961), p. 97.

3. Burnley Express and Clitheroe Division Advertiser, October 8 1924, p. 4, col. 7.

4. Ibid., August 17 1929, p. 16, col. 4.

the education in the town: it was estimated that in 1900 Burnley had 25,000 Sunday School scholars, teachers and helpers.<sup>1</sup> In the decade before the war the council increasingly took over responsibility for education, but the service was still imperfect in 1914.

BURNLEY : 1918 - 1939

The efforts Dan Irving had made to convert Burnley to Socialism were fulfilled in 1918, when he came top of the poll in the General Election. He held the seat until his death. Labour also polled well in the municipal elections of 1919, gaining six seats.<sup>2</sup> This success caused the Conservative and Liberal parties to ally for electoral purposes, an arrangement they maintained till the end of the period.

TABLE 1.1 : PARTY REPRESENTATION ON BURNLEY COUNCIL.<sup>3</sup>

	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL	LABOUR
1913	24	21	3
1919	21	18	9
1926	19	20	9
1930	18	16	14
1933	12	15	21
1934 <sup>4</sup>	9	13	26
1938 <sup>4</sup>	11	14	23

1. The County Borough of Burnley, Official Handbook (undated, c.1961), p. 54.

2. The Times, November 3 1919, p.7, col.2.

3. The years chosen are those when party strength changed significantly. Burnley Express, November 5 1913, p.4, col.4; Ibid., November 5 1919, p.4, col.1; The Burnley News, November 3 1926, p.8, col.1; The Times, November 30 1930, p.17, col.2; Ibid., November 2 1933, p.14, col. 2; Ibid., November 2 1934, p.9, col. 3; November 2 1938, p. 16, col.2.  
Ibid.,

4. change of control.

The post-war boom did not last long in Burnley: the cotton industry went into depression in 1920 and never really recovered. Drastic re-organisation was proposed by a minority of manufacturers, but most were content to wait for economic revival to solve the problems of the industry. Though there were periods of comparative prosperity (in 1924, and again in 1927 and 1928), renewed depression appeared in 1929, and thereafter unemployment rarely fell below 15%. Cotton mills were closed, and many never re-opened. The depression spread to the textile engineering industry, and deepened in mining. Although there were buoyant sectors of the Burnley economy, even during the early 1930's (such as clothing manufacture and kitchen utensils) these did not grow nearly fast enough to take up the slack in employment.

The economic situation went far to explain the Labour party's political success in Burnley. The party won every parliamentary election before 1931. Irving was succeeded by Arthur Henderson, who achieved a notable electoral triumph, in the by-election of 1924. The council remained under Conservative and Liberal control, though these parties became increasingly reliant on their overwhelming majority amongst the Aldermen in order to retain power. Their management of the council was skilful, and the depression did not prevent them from innovating: the financial competence of the town's leading civic figure, Alderman Grey, Chairman of the Finance Committee, enabled the council to embark on bold housing schemes during the 1920's.

The depression in Burnley was exacerbated by a series of labour disputes, culminating in prolonged strikes, between 1930 and 1932. These were provoked by the cotton employers, who endeavoured to force the workers, first to accept wage reductions,

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and later to agree to widespread redundancies. The employers were ultimately successful, and the employment the industry offered was reduced by almost half. This enabled the remainder of the industry in Burnley to survive, but those who had lost their jobs had little chance of regaining them. Many decided to migrate. The population of Burnley, which had been slowly declining since 1911, fell sharply during the 1930's.

TABLE 1.2 : POPULATION OF BURNLEY 1901 - 1951<sup>1</sup>

1901	97,350	1931	98,258
1911	106,765	1939	85,400
1921	103,157	1951	84,950

It was clear by the early 1930's that some dramatic initiative was needed to revive the town's economy. There was little to be hoped from Burnley's M.P's. Henderson was Foreign Secretary from 1929 to 1931 and was unable to spare much time for the problems of Burnley. In the election of 1931, he was defeated by the National candidate, Admiral Campbell, of 'Q' ships fame, who displayed little interest thereafter in his constituency. He was beaten in 1935 by W.A.Burke, an unimaginative trades union official.

Action had to come from the town council. This body had already demonstrated that it was prepared to break with traditional municipal attitudes when it merged its transport system with those of two neighbouring local authorities, a move that rapidly transformed three loss-making companies into one profitable concern. In 193<sup>4</sup>, the Labour party won control of the council and embarked immediately on a campaign to introduce new industries to Burnley. It had the support of the leaders of the

1. Census of England and Wales 1921. General Report with Appendices, pp. 25 - 6.

General Register Office, National Registration of England and Wales 1939 (British Museum photocopy), Table 3.

Census 1951 England and Wales. Preliminary Report, Table III.

Conservative and Liberal parties in this, and a small committee of three councillors was elected, and given special powers to enable it to act quickly by by-passing the cumbersome committee structure. Incentives to attract new industry were provided, to enable Burnley to compete with the Special Areas. Mills were let at very low rents, the council arranged to refurbish factories for new tenants, and, as its major step, built a speculative factory. The new industries programme was successful, and in five years, provided over 3,000 jobs. Nevertheless, unemployment did not drop below 15% until July 1937. Complete recovery did not come until the wartime economy got underweigh.

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### HALIFAX

Halifax lies in the Hebble valley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, almost surrounded by hills; its geographical situation has had similar effects on its industrial and political development as has that of Burnley. Halifax had three main industries - woollens and worsteds, carpets, and engineering of which machine tool engineering was the main subdivision. The carpet sector was dominated by a single company, John Crossley, but the other two industries consisted of a large number of small privately owned firms. All three industries relied on exports for a large proportion of their trade, but also had well developed domestic markets. Engineering prospered during the Great War, but carpets and woollens stagnated. Textiles in particular was believed, even before the war, to be a problem industry: it was felt by many authorities to have become uncompetitive and out of date in its methods.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, May 1924, p. 61; May 1927, p.51.



Politically, the town was radical: its two member parliamentary representation had been divided since 1906 between the Liberal and Labour parties. Municipally, the Liberal party was strongest, and the council controlled the trading departments. It had also pioneered technical education, and the town possessed an important regional college. The quality of the town's housing remained a major problem, and with this was associated a bad reputation for public health.

#### HALIFAX : 1918 - 1939

The successful candidate for Halifax in the election of 1918 was J.H. Whitley, a Liberal, who was related to the small group of families (the Crossleys', Whitleys' and Marchettis') who had dominated the business and political life of the town for much of the previous century. Halifax preferred local men to represent it in parliament, and all three M.P's elected during the interwar period were born and bred in the town. Whitley remained M.P. till 1928, and because he was the Speaker of the House of Commons, the constituency was not contested in the elections of 1922, 1923, and 1924.

The principal arena for political activity was consequently the town council. The Labour party grew rapidly during the early 1920's, and again between 1930 and 1934, both spells of heavy unemployment, but during periods of prosperity, it found the going very much harder, and was never able to dislodge the Liberals as the largest party in the town.

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TABLE 1.3 : PARTY REPRESENTATION ON HALIFAX COUNCIL<sup>1</sup>

	<u>CONSERVATIVE</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>	<u>LABOUR</u>	<u>INDEPENDENT</u>
1913	21	30	8	1
1919	16	31	11	2
1926	18	24	17	1
1930	17	26	17	
1934	16	23	20	1
1938	19	24	17	

The economy of Halifax was depressed in the 1920's: the principal industries were all in slump; but in the early 1930's revival began in engineering and carpets, and both were buoyant till the end of the period. Woollens never fully recovered and although unemployment totals were often as low as 5% after 1934, the figures concealed a considerable amount of under-employment, and short time working remained endemic in the textile industry till the Second World War began.

Whitley resigned in 1928, and in the ensuing by-election, the leader of the town's Labour party, Alderman Longbottom, was elected. He held the seat till 1931, when he was defeated by a Conservative, Gilbert Gledhill, brother of one of the leading Conservative councillors. He remained M.P. till 1945, defeating Labour and Liberal candidates in 1935. Relations between the two older parties were less happy in Halifax than in any of the other towns. The Liberals remained the dominant party on the council, but frequently had to fight off Conservative challenges for their wards.

The council was ably led, and the town was sufficiently prosperous to permit municipal innovations. The Poor Law Hospital

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1. The Halifax Courier, November 8 1913, p.5; Ibid., November 8 1919, p.8, col.3; The Halifax Courier and Guardian, November 6 1926, p.9, col.1; The Times, November 3 1930, p.17, col.2; November 2 1934, p.9, col.3; Ibid., November 2 1938, p.16. Ibid.,

was taken over and modernised in 1930; a new technical college was planned in 1939; and the number of secondary school places was greatly increased. A major development was the decision to abandon the trams, and replace them with buses. The change-over was managed by A.H.Gledhill. A municipal tradition of rigid independence was abandoned when he persuaded the council to agree to co-operate with the railway companies in the running of the transport system. The renewal of the borough's housing was a major endeavour of the council throughout the period, and this involved an active slum clearance policy. Despite considerable efforts, the problem was nowhere near solved by 1939.

Halifax ended the period with a reputation, by Northern standards, for comparatively good employment. Population did not decline very much.

TABLE 1.4 : POPULATION OF HALIFAX 1901 - 1951.<sup>1</sup>

1901	104,944	1931	98,115
1911	101,553	1939	96,702
1921	99,127	1951	98,376

Nevertheless, a superficially sound economic situation concealed one major flaw. The traditional industries remained very conservative in their organisation and methods of production. Very few showed a genuine inclination to modernise. Voices warning of the dangers of the failure to innovate were not heeded, which was the more serious as no new industries of significant size or importance moved to the town between 1919 and 1939.

1. Census 1921 General Report, pp. 25-6.  
General Register Office, National Registration 1939, Table 3.  
Census 1951 Preliminary Report, Table III.

IPSWICH

Ipswich, the county town of East Suffolk, is a port at the head of the tidal navigation of the river Orwell. It is the only one of these four towns to have played an important economic role before the industrial revolution. The town had experienced a long period of decline until the late 19th century, when revival began with the founding of several important engineering works, originally making agricultural machinery, though by the eve of the Great War, covering most branches of mechanical engineering. The town's docks were important, and a controversy had arisen in 1913 about the extent to which they should be developed, but modernisation was prevented by the onset of the war.

The independent labour movement was slow to develop in Ipswich: even after 1906 it was comparatively weak.<sup>1</sup> The Conservative and Liberal parties were approximately equally balanced in strength. The Church of England was by far the largest religious organisation in Ipswich; Non-conformity was weak, and Roman Catholicism almost non-existent. The town had a vigorous civic tradition that expressed itself in the development of a strong school system and good health services. The trading departments had only been partially municipalised: trams and electricity were managed by the Council, gas remained in private hands. The most serious social problem in 1914 was the poor standard of housing in the town, particularly the older working class districts which occupied the low lying land beside the river.

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1. H. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (1967), p. 92.

IPSWICH : 1918 - 1939

The successful candidate for Ipswich at the general election of 1918 was a Conservative, John Ganzoni, who was on the right of his party, and who remained M.P. for the town (with the exception of one brief period in the early 1920's) until 1938. The Conservatives were also the dominant party at the municipal level.

TABLE 1.5 : PARTY REPRESENTATION ON IPSWICH COUNCIL<sup>1</sup>

	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL	LABOUR
1913	21	18	1
1919	20	13	7
1926	33		7
1929	18	10	11
1933 <sup>2</sup>	27	6	15
1938	29	6	13

Labour success in the elections of 1919 encouraged the older parties to ally. The compact was very effective in keeping Labour out. The number of Labour councillors greatly underestimates the proportion of the poll the party obtained, which was often close to 50%. The alliance between the older parties operated greatly to the advantage of the Conservatives, and when it broke down in 1938, only six Liberals remained on the council. Labour capitalised on the widespread unemployment in the town during the early 1920's, and in 1923, the party's leader, Jackson, won the parliamentary seat from Ganzoni,

1. The figures for 1913 are approximate. It has not been possible to establish the parties of all the aldermen in that year. East Anglian Daily Times, November 3 1919, p.8; Ibid., November 2 1926, p. 12, col.1; The Times, November 2 1929, p.14, col.4; Ibid., November 2, 1933, p.14, col.2; Ibid., November 2 1938, p. 16, col.3.

2. Council enlarged.

though his success proved temporary and he lost it in 1924.

Ipswich council was a vigorous body, and played a large part between 1919 and 1923, in association with the Docks Commission, in modernising and extending the port. This was a major enterprise, and the expense of the scheme aroused considerable opposition in the town. Determination on the part of the leading Ipswich employers in combination with the Unions and the Labour party secured the passing of the proposals, which were to be of fundamental importance in attracting new industries to the town, and in encouraging those already there to expand.

The comparative prosperity of Ipswich in the late twenties encouraged some migration to the town, a process that resumed in the early thirties. The majority of the migrants came from the surrounding agricultural areas of East Anglia, which were depressed for much of the interwar period.

TABLE 1.6 : POPULATION OF IPSWICH 1901 - 1951<sup>1</sup>

1901	66,630	1931	87,569
1911	73,932	1939	99,634
1921	79,371	1951	104,788

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The main municipal political conflicts of the 1930's stemmed in part from this population increase. The older parties which controlled the council were reluctant to authorise sufficient additional expenditure to provide adequate services for the extra population, most of which was concentrated in expanding suburbs, which were also attracting migrants from the town centre. Health and education services, which had been

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1. Census 1921 General Report, pp. 25 - 26.  
General Register Office, National Registration 1939, Table 3.  
Census 1951 Preliminary Report, Table III.

the best developed in any of these towns in the early 1920's, were allowed to deteriorate during the 1930's. Labour challenged the older parties on this record, and although they were defeated in council, they made a considerable impression in the town, and this played an important part in the electoral success of R.R.Stokes in the by-election of 1938, when he won the seat for the Labour party.

A second factor behind Stokes's success was the persistence of pockets of unemployment in Ipswich, which averaged 8.1% during 1938,<sup>1</sup> rather higher than it had been in the late 1920's. The problem in Ipswich was not depressed industries, but technological unemployment, which resulted from the major companies shaking out labour during the decade. With the onset of war, this unemployment was soaked up, and the reorganisation of industry which had taken place during the 1930's had put the town's economy in a sound competitive position for the future.

#### LUTON

Luton, on the river Lea, 35 miles north of London, in the southern part of Bedfordshire, was the latest of these four towns to develop industrially. The town had long been known for the manufacture of straw hats, an industry directly related to agriculture, dominated by small employers, and still by far the major source of employment in 1914. A handful of engineering concerns had been established in the town in the decade before the war, but these remained weak, and were vulnerable to fluctuations in the trade cycle.

There was no Trades Unionism in the hat industry, and the Labour party was extremely weak. The Liberals dominated the town's politics, but had not espoused a strong civic tradition.

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1. Ministry of Labour, Local Unemployment Index, 1938.

Local government was shared with Bedfordshire County Council, but even in fields where Luton Council had a free hand, it had avoided taking up an active role: only electricity supply had been municipalised. Luton was the healthiest of these four towns, partly by reason of the comparative modernity of its housing, and partly because there was no heavy industry. The town's good reputation in this respect confirmed the Council in its complacent attitude to its civic role.

#### LUTON : 1918 - 1939

The return to peace in Luton was marked by the most serious riot the town had ever experienced. The absence of orthodox channels of protest meant that discontent had no other outlet than violence, and dissatisfied soldiers fired the Town Hall when they were unable to get their grievances met.

However, the discontent that sparked off the violence, like the severe unemployment that occurred during the early 1920's, did not bring any immediate benefit to the Labour party. The majority of electors continued to give their support to the older parties, though they were unclear as to which of them they preferred. The Liberals won the general elections of 1918, 1923 and 1929, whilst the Conservatives took those of 1922 and 1924. At the local level, party allegiances were not important before the 1930's. Many elections went uncontested, and councillors frequently stood as Independants. The Labour party did not become a significant electoral force until after 1933.

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TABLE 1.7 : PARTY REPRESENTATION ON LUTON COUNCIL.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>CONSERVATIVE</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>	<u>LABOUR</u>	<u>INDEPENDANT</u>
1913	7	17	-	-
1919	4	13	1	6
1926	6	15	1	2
1930 <sup>2</sup>	11	13	1	3
1934 <sup>2</sup>	14	15	3	3
1938	11	13	9	2

Councillors of the older parties were generally agreed about their principal objectives, which were: to keep expenditure as low as possible; and to resist the encroachments of Bedfordshire County Council, which sought to absorb various of Luton Council's responsibilities - at one stage, the police force, at another, the fire brigade.

The industrial make up of Luton began to change sharply in the mid-1920's, when several foreign companies established branches in the town; Electrolux of Sweden took over a Luton factory in 1926, whilst the Vauxhall Motor Company was bought in the same year by General Motors. By 1939, the town's economy had been transformed from one in which the manufacture of straw hats was the principal source of employment, to an economy that was becoming dominated by engineering, and by motor vehicle manufacture in particular. The prosperity of these industries in Luton attracted many migrants to the town, and the population rose sharply.

1. The Luton News and Bedfordshire Advertiser, November 6, 1913, p.5, col. 4; Ibid., November 6, 1919, p.8, col.2; Ibid., November 4, 1926, p.16; Ibid., November 6, 1930, p.12, col.3; Ibid., November 8, 1934, p.7, col.4; The Times, November 2 1938, p.16, col.3.

2. Council enlarged.

TABLE 1.8 : POPULATION OF LUTON 1901 - 1951<sup>1</sup>

1901	36,404	1931	70,486
1911	49,978	1939	100,806
1921	57,075	1951	110,370

This influx created many problems: in particular, the health, housing and educational services were soon under severe strain. The council reacted very slowly to the new situation. At no time during this period did it build enough council houses. Technical education was neglected, despite the rapidly growing importance of technology based industries. The inadequacy of the provision of health services was allowed to reach crisis point before the council moved. Its principal activity during the key years from 1926 to 1933, was to plan and build a new Town Hall, which involved as much capital expenditure as a hospital. The discontent about the priorities of Luton Council was used by the Labour party to build up a substantial base in the town. The party failed to win the parliamentary seat, though the older parties were sufficiently worried by the Labour challenge to combine against it.

E.L.Burgin, Liberal M.P. from 1929, stood as a Liberal National in 1931, and as a National in 1935, obtaining Conservative party support in both elections. The parties also combined to fight at the municipal level, which prevented split voting, so that although winning between 40% and 50% of the vote in the late 1930's, the Labour party held only a quarter of the council seats.

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1. Census 1921 General Report, pp. 25 - 26.  
General Register Office, National Registration 1939, Table 3.  
Census 1951 Preliminary Report, Table III.

## CHAPTER TWO

INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

One of the greatest contrasts during the interwar period between North and South was in industry. The Northern economies stagnated, whilst the Southern boomed. Contemporaries tended to over-state this contrast. The impression obtained from their records is often that the North had gone into irreversible decline. R.Graves and A.Hodge included the cotton district of Lancashire in their list of distressed areas which they defined as "parts of the country where heavy industries had been built up before the war, but where almost the whole population had now been thrown out of employment by the loss of foreign markets."<sup>1</sup> To J.B.Priestley, the North of England was "the England of the dole".<sup>2</sup> He wrote in 1933 "for generations, this blackened North toiled and moiled so that England should be rich and the City of London be a great power in the world. But now this North is half derelict, and its people, living on in the queer ugly places, are shabby, bewildered, unhappy."<sup>3</sup> He wanted to know "why had nothing been done about these decaying towns and their workless people?"<sup>4</sup>

Undoubtedly, there were towns in the North that were half derelict, where almost the whole population was on the dole: Jarrow was the most notorious example. Graham Greene described another: "it was like a gigantic rubbish heap into which everything had been thrown of a whole way of life - great rusting lift-shafts and black chimneys and Nonconformist chapels with slate roofs ... every house was the same: the uniformity

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1. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, The Long Week-End. A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939 (1961), pp.304-5.

2. J.B.Priestley, op. cit., p.407.

3. Ibid., p. 410.

4. Ibid., p. 411.

was broken only by an inn sign, the front of a chapel, an occasional impoverished shop ... the two streets were curiously empty for a working-class town, but then, there was no work to go to."<sup>1</sup> However, places where the economic situation was as bad as this were exceptional. Yet there has been a tendency among historians to regard the appallingly depressed towns like Gateshead and Maryport as typical of the North as a whole. Professor E.J.Hobsbawm has written that "the grimy, roaring, bleak industrial areas of the nineteenth century - in northern England, Scotland and Wales - had never been very beautiful or comfortable, but they had been active and prosperous. Now all that remained was the grime, the bleakness, and the terrible silence of the factories and mines which did not work, the shipyards which were closed."<sup>2</sup> Professor A.Marwick writes of England in the 1920's: "now a new pattern established itself: a prosperous, bustling South producing a tremendous range of new consumer goods; and a decaying North."<sup>3</sup>

The picture of a booming South, like that of a derelict North, originated in the writings of contemporaries. George Orwell wrote of Southern England as "the place to look for the germs of the future England ... in Slough, Dagenham, Barnet, Letchworth, Hayes ... the old pattern is gradually changing into something new. In those vast new wildernesses of glass and brick the sharp distinctions of the older kind of town, with its slums and mansions ... no longer exist ... It is a civilization in which children grow up with an intimate knowledge of magnetoes and in complete ignorance of the Bible. To that civilization belong the people who are most at home in and most

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1. Graham Greene, The Confidential Agent (Penguin edn., 1963), pp.161-2.
  2. E.J.Hobsbawm, The Pelican Economic History of Britain, Vol. 3, From 1750 to the Present Day. Industry and Empire (1969), p.208.
  3. A.Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War. War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967 (1970), p. 168.

definitely of the modern world, the technicians and the higher-paid skilled workers."<sup>1</sup> J.B.Priestley describes the industries of the South in similar terms: housed in "decorative little buildings, all glass and concrete and chromium plate ... tangible evidence ... to prove that the new industries have moved south."<sup>2</sup> "This is the England of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafés, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses."<sup>3</sup>

In the four towns in this study, the situation was much more diverse than this, and it is necessary to distinguish two problems. Firstly, although the Southern economies grew very much faster than the Northern, the latter did not decay, a "terrible silence" was not "all that remained." Secondly, poverty and unemployment were not confined to the North, they were widespread in the "prosperous bustling" South too.

It is the purpose of this chapter and chapter three to separate and explain two developments in the interwar period: firstly, the faster growth of the Southern economies, and secondly, why this growth was slow in working through to real incomes. This chapter is organised into two sections. The first examines the extent of economic growth in these four towns, and the factors that caused it; and the second describes the industrial experience of each town as an individual entity, because it is important to see them in their uniqueness, in addition to discussing them as points of contrast with one another. Chapter three enquires into the nature and location of poverty.

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1. George Orwell, Inside the Whale and Other Essays (Penguin edn., 1962), p. 89.

2. J.B.Priestley, op. cit., p.4.

3. Ibid., p. 401.

SECTION A : ECONOMIC GROWTH

The principal problem about measuring economic growth on a town basis is lack of evidence. Statistics of industrial production and income do not exist for towns, nor even for the English regions, during the interwar period. All the principal sources of information contain flaws, for reasons that will be explained. Two of them: employment figures, and statistics for factory building, will be used in this section; the third - materials provided by the localities (principally company records and newspapers) which vary very much in quality and quantity from town to town - do not provide exact points for comparison, and will consequently be used in Section B.

The main flaw in the statistics of employment is that no census was taken in 1941. Other information that is available for the late 1930's is not strictly comparable with the census figures for 1921 and 1931. The statistics are a maze - categories were changed from census to census, and the overall totals in Table 2.1 represent no more than a broad outline of the changes that occurred. The difficulties in interpreting the available figures are firstly that in the 1921 census, the occupied population was measured in terms of those aged twelve and over, whereas in that of 1931, the starting age had been raised to fourteen. Columns III and IV in Table 2.1 contain the total insured, and as such represent a fairly accurate picture of those who had work, or had what the authorities considered to be a reasonable chance of getting it. Yet not all occupied persons were insured: agricultural workers were not until 1936, domestic servants not until 1938, and independant workers not at all during this period.

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TABLE 2.1. CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT 1921 - 1938

	<u>COLUMN I<sup>1</sup></u>	<u>COLUMN II<sup>2</sup></u>	<u>COLUMN III<sup>3</sup></u>	<u>COLUMN IV<sup>4</sup></u>
	<u>1921 CENSUS</u>	<u>1931 CENSUS</u>	<u>JULY 1931</u>	<u>JULY 1938</u>
BURNLEY	61,205	59,960	48,220	42,560
HALIFAX	53,017	52,620	40,120	42,730
IPSWICH	35,206	39,797	28,660	33,770
LUTON	28,435	37,453	32,480	48,880
	<u>% CHANGE COL. I - II</u>		<u>% CHANGE COL. III - IV</u>	
BURNLEY	- 2.0		- 11.7	
HALIFAX	- 0.7		+ 6.5	
IPSWICH	+ 13.0		+ 17.8	
LUTON	+ 31.7		+ 50.5	

The employment picture alters whichever tables are compared. Several broad conclusions can, however, be safely made. It is apparent that Burnley lost employment substantially, the period of greatest loss being the thirties. Halifax suffered an employment decline during the earlier decade, though after 1931, as far as the insured were concerned, there was a small recovery. However, this may have been largely caused by previously uninsured occupations becoming insured. In Ipswich, there was growth in the total occupied in the 1920's, and an increase in the number of insured in the 1930's. Finally, in Luton there was a substantial rise in employment in both decades.

1. Occupied 12 years and over. Census of England and Wales 1921, County of Lancaster (1923), Table 16; County of Suffolk (1923), Table 16; County of Yorkshire (1923), Table 16; County of Bedford (1924), Table 16.

2. Occupied 14 years and over. Census of England and Wales 1931 Occupation Tables (1934), Table 16.

3. Total number of insured. Ministry of Labour, Statistics Division, Local Unemployment Index, April, 1932.

4. Total number of insured. Ibid., August 1939.

It would be useful at this point to proceed to an analysis of the changes in employment taking place in the sub-sectors of industry over this period. Unfortunately, this is impossible in view of the absence of census figures for 1941. No town produced detailed figures of employment categories for the late 1930's: the statistics that are available are estimates and as the subdivisions used are not the same as those defined for the censuses of 1921 and 1931, any comparisons would be subject to such large possibilities of error as to render them meaningless. It is proposed to reserve discussion of developments in the main sub-sectors of industry for the sections on economic change in the individual towns.

Employment statistics present one aspect of industrial change. An increase in the labour force, however, does not necessarily indicate improved efficiency or productivity, nor does a declining workforce always imply that an industry is declining too - the reverse could be the case if companies were making productivity gains by using labour more efficiently. Indeed an increase in the labour force could indicate that a firm is opting for the easiest and cheapest way of raising production by taking on more men rather than by installing machines. This had tended to be the approach of many textile and mining companies to satisfying rising demand for their products before the Great War.

Figures for firms' investment during the inter-war period are meagre. The most reliable evidence was collected by the Board of Trade and published in its Survey of Industrial Development. The statistics refer only to the period between

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between 1932 and 1938, and deal with investment in new plant, but not in machinery. For the purpose of this study, the surveys are an imperfect record, because much information is provided only on a sub-regional basis. These areas vary in size from those comparatively useful (Halifax and Huddersfield; Burnley and Blackburn) to those so large (Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire; Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge, Lincoln, Essex and Huntingdonshire) that they have comparatively little meaning for present purposes. The tables do confirm a decline in the number of factories operating in the North, and an increase in the South.

TABLE 2.2: FACTORIES OPENED AND CLOSED 1932-1938.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>FACTORIES CLOSED</u>	<u>FACTORIES OPENED</u>	<u>NET GAIN OR LOSS</u>
BLACKBURN AND BURNLEY	173	142	- 31
HALIFAX AND HUDDERSFIELD	61	25	- 36
BEDS AND HERTS	38	61	+ 23
NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK ETC.	27	50	+ 23

One of the most interesting points to emerge from the Board of Trade Survey is that from 1932 to 1938 the Burnley and Blackburn sub-district obtained more employment as a result of new factories being opened than any of the other areas. With 15,050 new jobs, more than double the employment was created there than in Norfolk and Suffolk etc. (6,550), Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire (5,700), and Halifax and Huddersfield (1,950).<sup>2</sup> The Blackburn and Burnley area was also losing firms and jobs more heavily than any other (the Survey does not state how many jobs),

1. Board of Trade, Survey of Industrial Development, 1933.  
Particulars of factories opened, extended and closed in 1933  
with some figures for 1932 (1934), Table 2; 1934, Table 2;  
1935, Table 2; 1936, Table 2; 1937, Table 2; 1938, Table 2.

2. Ibid., 1933, - 1938, Table 2.

but it does confirm that there was a substantial amount of industry moving into this area to compensate for the loss of employment that had occurred earlier.

However, a breakdown of the statistics of new factories and extensions of premises was provided, though there is little information about how many workers they employed (except that only factories with 25 or more workers are listed), and none about how much they cost to build. The Southern towns expanded uniformly. Between 1932 and 1938, Luton obtained 25 new firms and extensions of premises.<sup>1</sup> There were 15 hat companies, besides major additions to the half dozen important engineering companies that had been established in the town since the Great War. "Motor-vehicle" concerns (the companies are not named) expanded their premises in 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936, whilst other extensions included two to a ball bearing company (probably Skefco)<sup>1</sup>, and one each to a refrigerator company (almost certainly Electrolux), and to firms making aluminium castings, steering gears, and mineral waters.

Six concerns either moved to Ipswich or expanded their premises in the town during this period. Their diversity reflects the many-sided nature of the Ipswich economy: building components, manufacture of yeast, of chemical manure, the repair of gas cookers, and the making of underclothing (two).<sup>1</sup>

The experience of each Northern town was sharply contrasted with the other. Halifax obtained five new companies or

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1. Board of Trade, Survey of Industrial Development, 1933-1938, Appendices.

extensions: three were in textiles or clothing (worsted spinning, blouses, overalls), one manufactured confectionery, and the fifth, clocks.<sup>1</sup> Burnley, on the other hand, secured an impressively wide range of new industries. Twenty-three companies either expanded in Burnley, or moved to the town.<sup>1</sup> Ten of them were involved in the cotton industry, and although two of these each employed 200 workers<sup>2</sup>, the rest were probably small - there was a tendency during the thirties for mushroom companies to be set up,<sup>3</sup> with insubstantial financial backing, and hoping (generally unsuccessfully) to prosper by undercutting their rivals' prices. The other thirteen, however, included three in the important and growing kitchen utensils industry. The problem for Burnley was that all these firms were capital intensive, and did not employ large labour forces. The biggest of them employed only 500 men before the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately for the town, a second group of seven firms - involved in the manufacture of shoes and clothing, a labour intensive industry - also expanded in, or moved to, the town during the thirties. Three of these employed 660 people in 1939.<sup>5</sup> The three remaining concerns were: brick manufacture, the making of plastic mouldings, and the manufacture of aluminium dye castings.<sup>1</sup> It was an impressive record, in view of the fact that Burnley had no Government-backed inducements, because this part of Lancashire was not included in a Special Area.

Thus, measured by the two main sources of information that are available, growth proceeded very much faster in the

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1. Board of Trade, Survey of Industrial Development, 1933 - 1938, Appendices.

2. Ibid., 1933, p.33; 1937, p.35.

3. Burnley Express, December 14, 1935, p.20, col.1.

4. Ibid., January 1, 1938, p.12, col.2.

5. Ibid., February 15, 1939, p.8.

South in terms of employment, but when investment by industry is considered, the gap between the two regions is less sharp - at least as far as the period from 1932 to 1938 is concerned.

Why was economic growth faster in the South? A host of causes have been suggested, amongst them the rise of consumer durable industries, geographical situation, population growth and the housing boom, the National Government's tariff policy, and a higher Southern standard of education. It is proposed to consider these in relation to the four local economies to see how far they explain urban growth. It is possible first of all to relegate some factors to contributory, rather than initiatory positions in an urban growth table.

In the case of these four towns, population growth and the consequent rise in the rate of house<sup>e</sup>building followed, rather than preceded, industrial growth. A substantial amount of house construction occurred in all four towns from the early 1920's, largely to satisfy demand caused by the increasing number of private families, but it was not until the early 1930's that house building in the South began to take place at a very much faster rate than it did in the North. By that time, the foundations of industrial prosperity in Luton and Ipswich had already been laid. It was during the 1930's also that the most important population movements occurred. These may be briefly summarised:

PERCENTAGE POPULATION CHANGE DURING THE PERIOD<sup>1</sup>

	<u>1921 - 1931</u>	<u>1931 - 1939</u>
BURNLEY	- 4.8	- 13.1
HALIFAX	- 1.0	- 1.4
IPSWICH	+ 10.3	+ 13.8
LUTON	+ 23.5	+ 43.0

1. Census 1951 Preliminary Report, Table III.

Census 1921 General Report, pp. 25 -26.

General Register Office, National Registration 1939, Table 3.

The two towns most affected by population change, Burnley and Luton, did not feel its full impact until the 1930's. The Burnley cotton industry had been depressed for a decade before large numbers of people began to abandon hope of the town providing them with work. Luton's boom had been under weigh for several years before migrants began to choose it as offering good possibilities of employment. Possibly, the time lag in Luton's case is explained by the amount of time it takes a town to build up a national reputation for prosperity. However, there is no doubt that substantial population gains stimulated further industrial development, particularly in the civil engineering industry.

Secondly, a higher standard of education does not appear to have played a great part in bringing about faster growth in the South. In the sector of education that was the most attuned to the needs of industry - technical education - the North had an undoubted superiority, as will be shown below. This sector was particularly under-developed in Luton and Ipswich, where there was considerable successful resistance to proposals to build technical colleges.

For an explanation of a faster rate of economic growth in the South, it is necessary to look elsewhere. The argument here is that changes in the pattern of demand for the products of their industries sparked off rapid industrial development in the Southern towns, and slowed it down in the Northern. This development was boosted by three secondary but highly important factors: geographical situation, the nature of control of companies, and improvements in the technique of production.

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The major sectors of industry in the North relied to a great extent upon export markets. After the First World War, they found they had lost many of these. Cotton, and to a lesser extent, wool, were unable to compete with overseas competitors, whose products were cheaper. Both suffered from exclusion from some foreign markets because tariffs were raised against them, and this factor also hindered the export possibilities of two other important Halifax industries: carpets and confectionery.<sup>1</sup> The severity of this situation was exacerbated by the fact that several of the important remaining industries provided fuel or machinery for these basic trades: both the coal industry (Burnley) and the textile machinery industry (both Burnley and Halifax) suffered from depression during much of the period.

The Southern towns, on the other hand, produced goods for the expanding domestic market. In Luton, Vauxhall and Commer made cars, and Electrolux refrigerators, whilst a group of engineering concerns (e.g. Skefco, George Kent) manufactured components for these and similar industries throughout the country. Ipswich had a well-diversified economy that included the manufacture of clothing (William Pretty), drink and tobacco (Cobbold; Tollemache; Churchman), garden utensils (Ransome, Sim and Jefferies), and engineering components (Manganese, Bronze and Brass; William Reavell; Crane; Cocksedge etc.) The extent of the employment growth these industries offered may be illustrated by an example from each town. William Pretty employed 350 people in 1930, and almost 1,500 in 1939,<sup>2</sup> while Skefco had employed 200 workers in 1912, 1,000 in 1921, and 1,800 in 1938.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that it was those sectors

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1. A detailed examination of this point will be provided in the individual urban histories in Section B.
  2. R.A.N. Dixon (Ed.), The Official Guide to the Borough of Ipswich (undated; c.1948), pp.110 - 111.
  3. Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, May 1921, p.86.  
Luton News, July 28, 1938, p.3, col. 1.

of the economies of the Northern towns that produced goods for the domestic market that grew fastest during this period: kitchen utensils and clothing manufacture in Burnley, and food and sweets in Halifax.

The Southern towns possessed an additional advantage over Burnley and Halifax in their geographical situations. Both were comparatively close to the London and Home Counties market, which was amongst the fastest growing in Europe, and Ipswich in addition was a port. Transport costs to this major market were far lower than equivalent costs from places like Burnley and Halifax. The counties in which Luton and Ipswich were situated were amongst the more attractive in England, and in addition the terrain was fairly flat, providing ample land for industrial building. Firms seeking sites for new plant preferred places like Luton and Ipswich to towns further North.

Ipswich, though further away from London than Luton, possessed the great advantage of good docks. As a result of the energies of prominent local industrialists, who used their positions on the Borough Council and the Docks Commission to make port improvements a priority of both bodies, the docks were modernised between 1919 and 1939. The consequence was that many firms in the town built new factories near the docks, whilst national companies which relied on imports or exports established branches in Ipswich. For example, Fison's built a new dockside factory during the 1930's, in which they centralised the production of superphosphates, previously carried out in five separate plants.<sup>1</sup> Eight other major Ipswich companies owned or bought dockside premises, several of them constructing plant during this period in order to take advantage of the improvements

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, October 14, 1938, p.5.

that had been made to the port.<sup>1</sup> The policy of the Docks Commission in extending the port was deliberately aimed to take advantage of the "tendency now ... to develop factory sites in the South of England."<sup>2</sup>

Towns like Burnley and Halifax, relatively remote from major ports and cities, had great difficulty in competing for new industries with places with such advantages. Further points against them were their lack of flat land which the new lay out of modern plants required;<sup>3</sup> their unhealthy atmosphere and unpleasant environment; and the fact that they were both virtually on railway sidings. The rail links of Halifax with London and the Midlands were so poor they caused "real anxiety" in the town.<sup>4</sup> The 28 mile railway journey from Burnley to Manchester took an hour and a half to complete.<sup>5</sup> The disadvantage of the terrain of the Northern towns may be illustrated by one example. The Butler Machine Tool Company's Halifax factory had been built on a hillside, whilst the foundry which supplied castings, and the railway from which the machines were transported were situated in valleys. Teams of 14 horses had to be used in the decade before the First World War to haul planer beds and tables up and down the hillsides between the factories and the station.<sup>6</sup>

There was little the Northern towns could do to counteract the two disadvantages discussed above. They could not alter their geographical situation; neither could they take very much action to remedy the international trading disadvantages they

1. The Ipswich Engineering Society, The History of Engineering in Ipswich (1950), p. 66.  
County Borough of Ipswich, The Official Handbook (undated, c.1951), map opposite p. 127.
2. East Anglian Daily Times, May 23, 1922, p.4, col.1.
3. One of the arguments Burnley Council used in 1935 when it was arguing for an extension of the Borough was the lack of flat land for new housing and industry within the existing boundaries. Burnley Express, April 10, 1935, p. 8.
4. The Halifax Courier, February 8, 1919, p.4, col.3.
5. Burnley Express, March 21, 1925, p.16, col.1.
6. The Butler Machine Tool Co., Butler 100 Years 1868 - 1968 (undated) p. 5.



found themselves facing during this period. In other respects, however, their problems were of their own making, and in no case more than in the structure and organisation of industry. The prevalent form of company in the North was the private family firm; in the South, it tended to be increasingly the public company. In the South, in the case of the principal firms, family control had been given up before the First World War. There were two main types of Ipswich company: wholly owned subsidiaries of national companies (e.g. Crane, British Steel Piling etc.) and companies founded by Ipswich men which remained independent and had gone public. In 1920, the nine largest employers in Ipswich were all publicly owned companies, and although the management of several of these firms remained in the hands of the families which had founded them (e.g. members of the Tollemache and Cobbold families still held managerial positions in the breweries of the same names; F.G.C.Fison was chairman of Fison's; E.C.Ransome was managing director of Ransomes, Sim, and Jefferies; and Sir William Reavell was managing director of Reavell's), all had been willing to risk sharing control in order to obtain the advantages that derived from a stock market quotation.

The structure of control of industry in Luton was different to that in Ipswich in as much as four of the five principal employers were subsidiaries of national (Davis Gas Stove Co.) or international (Vauxhall, Skefco, Electrolux) companies. The fifth firm was the publicly owned engineering company, George Kent, whose chairman was a descendant of the founder. These firms employed nearly 30% of the insured labour force in Luton

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by 1938.<sup>1</sup>

The control of industry in the North remained mainly in the hands of a large number of small privately owned firms. This was especially true of the textile and engineering industries which together amounted to well over half the industry in the Northern towns during the interwar period. The largest employers in Burnley in the late 1930's were cotton millers: in 1937 - 1938, Witham Brothers employed 1,250<sup>2</sup>, T.Spencer 650, Heasandford 450, Haythornthwaite, and Nuttall and Crook 300 apiece. All these companies were privately owned. The publicly owned companies in the town were all, in terms of employment, very much smaller. Three of them went public in the 1930's<sup>3</sup> - two made domestic utensils and the third was a road haulage concern.

In Halifax, there were two large public companies: Mackintosh's and John Crossley. The latter was still the biggest employer in Halifax, though the workforce was steadily declining in size during this period, from 2,380 in 1924 to 2,056 in 1937.<sup>4</sup> Members of the Crossley family still had interests in the carpet company, whilst the chairman of Mackintosh's was the son of the founder. The next group of companies, in terms of the size of employment, were a mass of woollen and engineering firms, employing upto 500 apiece, the great majority privately owned, and small in terms of capital. Only a tiny handful of these went public during this period.<sup>5</sup>

If the first of the factors discussed in this section of the chapter had been favourable, i.e., if the international trading framework had remained in the same condition after the

1. Luton News, February 20, 1936, Supplement; Ibid., June 9, 1938, p.7; Ibid., July 28, 1938, p.3, col.1.
2. Rayon and Silk Directory and Buyers' Guide of Great Britain, 1937 - 8, pp.16 - 17; Ibid., 1938 - 9, pp.16 - 17.
3. Burco; W.H.Dean and Son; Oswald Tillotson.
4. Letter from G.C.Hamilton, Company Secretary, John Crossley and Sons Ltd., dated 29th. October 1970, to E.D.Smithies.
5. E.g. Standeven and Co. (worsted); Butler Machine Tool Co.

Great War as before it, then the prevalence of family firms in the North might not have been a serious handicap. But given the problems of reorganisation and readjustment most Northern (and many Southern) companies faced after 1918, the predominance of family firms was to prove a severe disadvantage. It would be incorrect to assume that all family firms were incompetently managed - a few matched the major public concerns in their growth records - and a brief examination of their progress will be provided below. There can be no doubt, however, that many privately owned family firms had severe handicaps compared to public companies, and that this was a major factor preventing the North from achieving a rapid rate of growth.

Firstly, they found great difficulty in raising additional finance. They were not able to go to the stock market for extra capital to finance new lines, or to modernise equipment. Several private firms had imaginative managements, but they lacked the capital to put their ideas into practise. Secondly, they had inadequate resources to deal with the new conditions of the interwar period - they had too few trained staff, they did too little research, they were ill-prepared to apply the new techniques in advertising, marketing, accounting, streamlining factory production lines, etc., that were becoming available during the interwar period.

In this second respect, it was possible for the private firms to take action by agreeing to amalgamations or mergers. These are not a cure-all - amalgamations in cotton might well have failed to save the industry - but the significant fact is that they were not tried. Cotton and woollen manufacturers considered this solution only to reject it, even though many suffered from shortage of funds, and all were facing sharp

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foreign competition. The difficulties experienced in the textile industry in the way of setting up even very loose associations between companies may be illustrated by reference to wool. In 1924, at a meeting of the British Research Association for the Woollen and Worsted Industry with Halifax Chamber of Commerce, one Halifax manufacturer argued that Britain's woollen and worsted industry had fallen behind its foreign rivals, and concluded that "all agreed that this was due to the better scientific and technical training of their competitors."<sup>1</sup> Co-operation was essential because "there were no firms large enough to employ their own scientists and chemists."<sup>1</sup> Such proposals for co-operation got nowhere. Even the one that would involve the least sacrifice of independence - the pooling of research resources - did not materialise. In 1937, a wool textile spinner warned his colleagues at the annual dinner of the Master Spinner's Federation that Government Departments took a more favourable attitude to an industry if it had a research department. "He suggested that as part of their general effort to impress the authorities with their efficiency, the research association became a piece of shop window dressing with which they could not wisely dispense."<sup>2</sup> It does not sound as though even the advocates of pooled research were very convinced of the intrinsic merits of the idea.

In this respect, they present a marked contrast to the principal industrialists in the South. The prolonged agricultural depression from 1880 to 1914 affected several firms in Ipswich which manufactured agricultural implements, and they decided on a series of mergers which continued to be formed during the inter-war period. E.R. & F. Turner's, an engineering company

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, May 1924, p.61.

2. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 20, 1937, p.9, col.2.

employing over 800 workers in 1918, became part of "Agricultural and General Engineers Ltd", along with several other East Anglian companies.<sup>1</sup> Fears of the strength of American competition in agricultural machinery prompted this move. Apprehension about American competition also encouraged the merger of Churchman Tobacco with Imperial Tobacco, on the eve of the Great War. Need for the pooling of resources, the rationalisation of production, and the additional capital strength a larger company would possess, encouraged Ransomes, Sim and Jefferies in its merger with a company based in Grantham.<sup>2</sup> Similar motives lay behind the series of mergers in which Fison's was involved, and which expanded the issued share capital of the company from £160,000 <sup>in 1921</sup> to £1,574,860 by 1938.<sup>3</sup>

Why did this regional contrast occur? As far as going public was concerned, it appears that the key period in which opportunities were missed was that before 1920. After 1921, the depressed conditions in cotton, wool, and engineering made the flotation of companies very difficult. The depression, however, did not rule out amalgamations - indeed, a period of falling profits might have been expected to encourage mergers, or at least "gentleman's agreements" to prevent price cutting, and to maintain margins. That such agreements were not made, even in cotton, indicates the strength of opposition to mergers. It is difficult to explain this opposition without referring to the fierce and stubborn independence of entrepreneurs in the Northern staple industries. They were not prepared to share control of their companies with erstwhile rivals. In the South, the position was different. Southern industrialists

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, January 17, 1919, p.4, col.6. Ipswich Engineering Society, op.cit., pp. 71 - 72.
  2. East Anglian Daily Times, March 14, 1919, p.4, col.6.
  3. The Stock Exchange Year-Book for 1921, p. 2366; The Stock Exchange Official Year-Book 1938, p. 1257.

appear to have been more single-minded in their pursuit of profits, more determined to try a wide variety of solutions to a problem. The need to satisfy shareholders was of crucial importance in this. In the North, this type of pressure was generally absent. Although the profit motive was obviously important, so were others, and the determination to preserve family control was perhaps the most important of all. There may have been a subsidiary reason explaining why Southerners were prepared to share control, whilst Northerners were not. This was the fact that whilst Southern entrepreneurs had other interests besides their companies, the Northerners did not. The Ipswich businessmen mentioned above (with one exception - Reavell) had inherited country estates and it may have been that their dynastic ambitions were centred on these rather than on their companies. In the North, however, most entrepreneurs had not been in a sufficiently large way of trade to acquire estates, and so had only the factory or mill to leave to their heirs. They were consequently all the more reluctant to share and thereby risk losing control.

From the structure of control, several very important consequences followed. Firstly, Southern companies had access to a greater number of sources of finance, which they could tap in order to take advantage of developments in the home market or to re-organise their production lines away from exports. The foreign-owned firms in Luton were able to appeal to their parent companies if they needed additional capital. For example, Vauxhall's were loaned £349,187 by General Motors between 1926

and 1931<sup>1</sup> to expand the factories and introduce new machinery. The principal Ipswich companies were able to appeal to the public for additional finance. Fison's, for example, increased its issued share capital from £518,859 to £1,574,860 between 1930 and 1938.<sup>2</sup> In Luton, the issued share capital of George Kent rose over the same period from £193,722 to £418,722,<sup>3</sup> whilst that of Skefco increased from £500,000 to £800,000 between 1936 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> Both these ways of raising capital were denied to the great majority of concerns in Burnley and Halifax. Southern companies were therefore able to make widespread improvements. The process of modernising plant and equipment began during the First World War. Many Southern firms produced munitions, and the enormous demand from the army encouraged widespread remodelling of buildings and installation of more up-to-date machinery. At the end of the War, in the short term, this had unfortunate consequences. Many Southern firms were overburdened with excess capacity and their situation was further weakened by the Government selling off surplus stocks in certain lines such as lorries, ball bearings, etc., but once the trade revival started, wartime improvements put them in an advantageous position. In the North the large cotton, wool, clothing, carpet, and confectionery industries, were barely touched by the wartime process of modernisation because of the comparatively minor contributions they made to the war effort.

Many post war improvements and innovations were produced by foreign owned companies, mainly Swedish and American. The

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1. The Vauxhall Motor Company, Balance Sheet, 1932. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, File No. 135767, Vol.13.
  2. The Stock Exchange Official Intelligence for 1930, p.711; The Stock Exchange Official Year-Book 1938, p. 1257.
  3. The Investors' Chronicle and Money Market Review, 29 May 1937, p. 1529.
  4. Ibid., 10 April 1937, p.995; Ibid., 17 June, 1939, p. 1438.

influence of these firms can be traced, for example, in Luton. By 1939 three of the town's largest and most successful companies - Electrolux, Skefco, and Vauxhall were foreign-owned, and their importance was not merely that they provided a large amount of employment. They also set an example to other similar firms in the locality. In the case of Vauxhall this was in plant layout and the application of production line techniques, in the case of the two Swedish firms, both plant organisation and personnel management impressed local businessmen.

The Swedish firms were conscious of the benefit of good public relations and frequently threw open their factories to visitors from other companies. Members of the Chamber of Commerce were encouraged to visit Skefco's plant, and were shown how it tackled the layout of machinery and its facilities for promoting good labour relations. The Chamber of Commerce Journal reported that "the visitors were much struck with the extent of the buildings, and also with the excellent manner in which they are planned ... light and air space are plentiful, and ... there is a well-equipped welfare section for their benefit, under the supervision of a trained nurse." Particularly unusual in Luton in the early 1920's was the "spacious canteen, with its charming surrounding garden, and the social and sports club."<sup>1</sup>

If Skefco was remarkable for its innovations in labour relations, Vauxhall pioneered the introduction of the new production line techniques into Luton, after it was taken over by General Motors in 1926. Vauxhall's success (by 1936,<sup>2</sup> profit per car was double that on Ford and Austin cars) forced other car companies to rethink their methods or face the

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1. Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, May 1921, p. 87.

2. "Well-confirmed" estimates. The Economist, July 10, 1937, p.62.



possibility of losing their markets. Its influence can be traced directly, through Commer cars, later, part of the Rootes group, which had a factory in Luton. Comments by the firm's manager show how far the activities of companies like Vauxhall provided an example. Amalgamation with Hillman and Humber enabled the company to obtain "improved financial status" which could be used for "drastic alterations in factory layout". Further benefits of the merger were centralised purchases, pooled research facilities, and the concentration of administration in one centre, all of which, it was hoped would reduce costs.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of foreign concerns such as Vauxhall was thus an incentive to competitors to improve their own methods. The absence of such companies - and during the interwar years, no foreign concerns established branches in Halifax, and only one in Burnley - was a considerable disadvantage. Foreign investment made a direct contribution to the economies of the Southern towns, and the shock of having to compete with American technology or Swedish personnel management could be a great stimulant to local industries.

The confidence Southerners felt about the permanence of prosperity was reflected in a high rate of capital investment in Luton and Ipswich. The factories of Vauxhall, Skefco, and Electrolux were all substantially the products of the interwar period. At least nine of the largest companies in Ipswich rebuilt or extended part of their plant between 1919 and 1939.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, they were producing goods on modern equipment in well laid out buildings, whereas in the North, firms were still relying on ageing machinery and scattered buildings.

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1. Luton News, June 4, 1931, p.8, col.1.

2. I.e., E.R.& F.Turner, Ltd., Cocksedge and Co, Ltd., British Fermentation Products, Ltd., W.A.& A.C.Churchman, Wm.Pretty & Co,Ltd., R.A.N.Dixon, Ipswich Guide (c.1948), pp.102 - 111; Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies, Ltd., Fisons Ltd., The Manganese, Bronze and Brass Co,Ltd., Crane Ltd., Ipswich Engineering Society, op. cit., pp. 66 - 121.

Businesses moving to the North tended not to build new plant, but to move into old mills which they could buy or rent at very low prices. Expansion there tended to take place via the old mills (for example, Crossley's of Halifax had its production spread out among some 30 separate factories; and Lucas in Burnley was expanding between 1939 and 1946 by buying up mills often some distance apart). Such places were ill-fitted for the new processes of industrial production. An American visitor to Halifax noted in 1925 "the unsuitability ... of our business premises ... for producing economically, [and especially] the disregard for continuity of process, wherein we have much waste in carrying material from one room to another."<sup>1</sup>

Southern companies were generally much more efficient in making economical use of labour than Northern ones. Some firms were very practised at doing this; for example, Skefco had avoided the full impact of the wage increases of 1914 - 1920 by obtaining higher productivity per man.<sup>2</sup> In the North, for much of the period, the traditional labour relations policy of firms hit by a slump was maintained, which was to keep employees on as long as possible by short time working. This was done partly for humanitarian reasons, and partly because the labour force had taken a comparatively long time to train, and the employer did not wish to see it break up, even if this meant producing cloth for which there was not yet a market. The fact that substantial numbers of both cotton and woollen manufacturers were councillors contributed to their reluctance to antagonise workers. It was not until many mills were faced with the prospect of bankruptcy that cotton entrepreneurs started

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, April 1925, p. 47.

2. Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, April 1923, p. 58.

to shake out surplus labour and use the rest more economically by increasing the amount of work done by each employee. The large Southern companies, many of them directed from London or abroad, without close links in the towns, felt able to be much more ruthless in dealing with labour. It is perhaps significant that those Southern firms where the employer had local political ambitions were also those which handled labour relations tenderly (e.g. Ransomes and Rapier, which was run by the Stokes family, was one of the first firms in Ipswich to introduce holidays with pay).<sup>1</sup> In industries such as cotton, wool, machine tools, textile engineering etc., where employer - employee relations were close - to the extent that the two sides were often on christian name terms - employers found it much harder to dismiss men, and especially the older workers. It would be unfair to many Northern industrialists to argue that their failure during the interwar period was always the result of obstinacy, reactionary ideas, or a refusal to face the requirements of the times. Their humanitarian traditions were also a factor hindering their ability to adopt modern techniques. It could indeed be argued that these traditions made an important contribution to the profitability of the business - provided the general situation of the firm was sound. Northern employers had pioneered the introduction of profit sharing schemes, and other beneficial arrangements for employees<sup>2</sup>, which made for comparatively good relations between employer and worker.

Finally, the influence of Government policy must be considered. Generally, the impact of this was slight, and its importance lay in what was not done, rather than the opposite.

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1. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Ransomes and Rapier Ltd., Report of the Directors, 1937, File. No. 47585, Vol.2.

2. E.g. Mackintosh's introduced a profit sharing bonus to fluctuate with the firm's ordinary dividend, life insurance of £100 for each worker, the costs to be borne by the firm, and maternity benefits, all in 1922. Halifax Courier and Guardian, December 17, 1921, p.10, col.4. Vauxhall's did not commence profit sharing till 1936. Luton News, March 12, 1936, p. 11.

The deflationary policies of the early 1920's, which led up to the return to the Gold Standard, were strongly opposed by businessmen in exporting industries. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, which generally reflected accurately the views of the town's prominent businessmen, commented as early as October 1925 that the "experts seem agreed that ... we made a return to the gold standard too soon."<sup>1</sup> It is questionable how far the return to the Gold Standard contributed to a fundamental worsening of the trading situation in the export industries, but it certainly had an adverse effect on businessmen's morale, confirming them in their reluctance to contemplate fresh investment. In political terms, it stiffened many of them in their preference for the Liberal party.

Secondly, the general introduction of protection in the 1930's favoured those industries producing for the domestic market, i.e., it worked far more strongly to the advantage of the South than the North, though there were companies in both Burnley and Halifax which also received considerable benefits as a result of this policy. The advantages of tariffs had been apparent to some of the consumer durable industries from the early 1920's. The McKenna duties in particular had protected the car industry, and the Labour government's decision in 1924 to abolish them, with strong backing from the Liberal party, was cited as one of the principal causes of Vauxhall's difficulties at that time, forcing it to lay off workers, and providing much of the impetus behind the sharp defeat the town's Liberal M.P. suffered in the 1924 election.

The National Government's tariff policy after 1931 gave

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, October 1925, p. 107.

Southern industrialists much greater confidence for the future, and encouraged them to invest in new plant and equipment. This optimism extended to those concerns which were endeavouring to shift production away from exports to the domestic market. For example, in 1932, Ransomes and Rapier of Ipswich only barely made a profit, and the condition of their overseas trade had deteriorated to such an extent that "export has fallen to an almost negligible quantity"<sup>1</sup> yet orders for the home market were so bouyant in this and the following year that the company felt confident enough about the future to buy land adjoining the factory for future extensions.<sup>2</sup>

The experience of the interwar period produced a revolution in the attitudes of many Northern industrialists to government interference in the economy. During the early post war years, businessmen in the staple trades still supported the pre-war economic philosophy of opposition to all government interference in the economy. For example, Halifax Chamber of Commerce advocated in the autumn of 1920 "that all Government restrictions on imports or exports should be immediately removed ... and it is also much desired that every trade should stand on its own unaided efforts without calling for or receiving imperial subsidies."<sup>3</sup> Such attitudes did not long survive the onset of the slump. In 1926, the Editor of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal suggested that the policy some foreign countries had introduced, of raising tariffs against British imports, "must invite retaliation."<sup>4</sup> However, the assistance industries demanding tariffs received was sometimes of dubious value. The Luton hat industry had been strongly in favour of tariffs, but found

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1. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Ransomes and Rapier Ltd., Report of the Directors, 1933, File No. 47585, Vol. 2.

2. Ibid., 1934.

3. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, December 1920, p. 2.

4. Ibid., September 1926, p. 99.

that when these were applied to their industry the raw material was in fact taxed, whilst the finished hats were let into the country without a charge being imposed. The manufacturers felt, with some justice, that they were even worse off than before.<sup>1</sup>

The cotton industry became increasingly strident in its demands for Government assistance. These calls all involved to a greater or lesser extent the taxpayer subsidising the exporter. For example, one Burnley authority on the cotton industry argued that "it would have paid the Government ... if they had set up a cotton board, and through that board advanced the differences by which orders could be taken that otherwise had to be rejected. By this means the industry would have been kept going, and the operatives have been employed at far less cost than has been the case by the 'dole' and the PAC."<sup>2</sup> The Government rightly ignored such pleas, which, if adopted, would merely have postponed the day of reckoning for the cotton industry. A much more serious criticism of the Government's approach to the problems of the staple trade was its refusal to interfere with the market forces by directing industry to Burnley. Indeed, the policy of the Government was directly antagonistic to the interests of the town. North East Lancashire had not been designated a Special Area, and so was at a disadvantage compared to those that were. Burnley Council endeavoured to attract new industries by buying up empty mills, modernising them, and letting them at low rents to new industries. It also built a speculative factory. When the Ministry of Health heard about these policies, it intervened and imposed severe restrictions about what the council could do in future.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Luton News, May 19, 1932, p.5, col.1.

2. Burnley Express, January 4, 1936, p.5, col.2.

3. The Council was required to consult the Ministry of Health before it proceeded with any industrial action, Burnley Express, July 28, 1937, p.8, col.1; the Council was instructed by the Ministry to obtain a 6% return on capital expenditure on industrial premises, Ibid., June 4, 1938, p. 11, col.7; the Burnley New Industries sub-committee was forbidden to publicise its efforts, Ibid., October 1, 1938, p. 13, col. 3.

Thus the overall picture of the towns at this time is of an industrially advancing South, but a slower moving North. Yet it would be unjust to Northern industry to describe it as wholly outpaced. There were important companies in the North that were every bit as dynamic as the leaders in the South, and to set the record right a brief discussion of growth companies in Burnley and Halifax must be included in this section.

The problem is to find an accurate method of comparing the efficiency of firms. Rates of return on capital represent the most satisfactory mode of contrasting company performance, but the shortage of adequate balance sheets for this period, and particularly the absence of returns for the private companies which prevailed in the North, rules this method out. A second mode of comparison involves examining changes in turnover per employee, but again, shortage of material renders this difficult. Annual reports at this time rarely included such information as value of turnover or the number of employees, and none of those available for firms in these four towns did so. Nor has it been possible to extract such information from most firms. Many have disappeared in mergers or take-overs, and the original records have been lost or destroyed. Others are unable to produce the information either because they still regard it as "confidential", or because they either do not have a policy of preserving records from the not so recent past, or because they simply cannot find them. However, in the case of a few companies it has been possible to obtain the relevant statistics, and calculations can be made from these as to changes in turnover per employee. The comparison stretches from 1924 to 1937: 1924 has been

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selected because the aftermath of the war was no longer seriously affecting production, whereas a comparison of 1937 with 1921 would produce a distorted picture because of the acute depression in the earlier year.

TABLE 2.3: CHANGES IN TURNOVER PER EMPLOYEE, 1924 - 1937.<sup>1</sup>

<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>TYPE OF FIRM</u>	<u>1924</u>	<u>1937</u>
BARDEN MILL CO.	COTTON WEAVING	£ 384 (e)	£ 583 (e)
<u>HALIFAX</u>			
CROSSLEY CARPETS		£ 363	£ 534
<u>IPSWICH</u>			
CRANFIELD BROS. <sup>2</sup>	FLOUR MILLERS	£3155	£3385
RANSOMES AND RAPIER	ENGINEERS	£ 532	£ 683
<u>LUTON</u>			
SKEFCO	BALL BEARINGS	£ 416	£ 657

The table thus provides very limited information, and no general conclusions can be drawn from it. What, however, it does demonstrate, is that some firms in the North were obtaining improvements in productivity as sharp as those <sup>that</sup> companies were making in the South. Barden Mill Company produced a rise in turnover per employee of 50%, and Crossley Carpets achieved one of 47%, which compared respectably with those obtained by the Southern firms.

These examples of progressive Northern firms can be multiplied. The Burco washboiler company increased its sales by an annual average of almost 40% between 1933 and 1936.<sup>3</sup> This firm had a board of four directors, two of whom were also

1. (e) = estimates

Information by letters to E.D.Smithies from:  
 The Barden Mill Co (Burnley) Ltd. (undated, c. Nov. 1970).  
 G.Miller, Assistant Secretary, Cranfield Bros, 3 Nov. 1970.  
 P.A.Champion, Director of Public Relations, The Skefco Ball Bearing Co.Ltd., 5 Nov. 1970.  
 G.N.Rodgers, Secretary, Ransomes and Rapier Ltd., 30 Oct. 1970.  
 G.C.Hamilton, Company Secretary, Crossley Carpets, 29 Oct. 1970.

2. Turnover for the year to 30 June 1923.

3. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Burco Ltd., File No. 318108.



cotton manufacturers in Burnley, and one of the latter was the Joint Managing Director of Burco.<sup>1</sup> Three of the four took an active part in local affairs, being J.P's. When the firm became a public company in 1936, three of the four major shareholders apart from the above were Burnley cotton manufacturers.<sup>1</sup> It is clear therefore that some cotton millowners were willing enough to get out of the cotton trade if the opportunity presented itself, and had enough business sense to invest in promising companies. Even within the decaying cotton industry, several firms were innovators, transferring to new lines of production. The mills of J.H. Grey moved to the production of artificial silks in the early 1920's,<sup>2</sup> and by the late 1930's had diversified into the manufacture of rayon, voile, and crêpe-de-chine.<sup>3</sup> The switch to products in demand at home, combined with a sharp slimming of the labour force by increasing the number of looms each weaver operated explains why Grey's mills were amongst the few producing profits in 1938 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> Also profitable in 1938 and 1939 were the mills of Robert Pickles, which had been diversified with considerable skill, producing leather cloth upholstery for Austin cars,<sup>5</sup> as well as rayon.

Two examples may be given from Halifax to further illustrate that entrepreneurial dynamism had not vanished from the North. The Butler Machine Tool Company was an old established Halifax firm, of which the first five directors (from 1868 to 1937) were all members of the Butler family.<sup>6</sup> The company was very competently managed, and its history contradicts some of the more superficial generalisations made about Northern industry during the interwar period. Though family controlled, it was not afraid of compromising

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1. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Burco Ltd., File No. 318108.

2. Burnley Express, September 27, 1924, p.11.

3. Rayon and Silk Directory and Buyers' Guide of Great Britain (1937 - 38), pp. 16-17.

4. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, John Grey (Textile Holdings) Ltd., File No. 456834.

5. Ibid., Robert Pickles Co. Ltd., File No. 37875.  
Rayon and Silk Directory (1937 - 38), pp. 16-17.

Burnley News, January 24, 1931, p.9, col.5.

6. Butler Machine Tool Co., op. cit., p.5.

its independence. It was a founder member in 1917 of Associated British Machine Tool Makers<sup>1</sup>, an industrial association which operated a sales organisation, and which arranged that member companies would specialise in producing certain types of machinery. The family did not inhibit the growth of the firm by keeping it as a private company: it went public in 1936. Nor were they backward in their attitude to overseas trade - during the interwar period 40% of production was exported, and a particularly close association was built up after 1931 with the U.S.S.R., to the extent that a Russian inspector of machine tools lived permanently in Halifax with a house near the works.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the firm did not react to the depression by producing traditional goods, it innovated continually - for example making machinery for the manufacture of toffee.

The founder of a Halifax confectionary firm, John Mackintosh (1868 - 1920) was one of the most remarkable businessmen of the first quarter of the century. He built up his company from a side street sweet shop in Halifax to a business capitalised at £600,000 by the time of his death.<sup>3</sup> Mackintosh combined in his character many of the attributes traditionally associated with the first generation captain of industry. He started his business in 1890 with very little capital and for the first twenty years of his career paid himself a wage in order to plough back as much money as possible into the company.<sup>4</sup> He did not hesitate to learn from the Americans: his success began when he blended imported American caramels with his own butter scotch.<sup>5</sup> But his principal innovations were not in production, but in advertising, and he successfully popularized both his products and himself. He introduced "Tit-Bits Toffee" and "Answers Toffee"

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1. Butler Machine Tool Co, op. cit., p. 5.

2. Ibid., pp. 8 - 9.

3. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, John Mackintosh and Sons Ltd., File No. 173750.

4. G.W. Crutchley, John Mackintosh. A Biography (1921), p. 31.

5. Ibid., p. 33.

to take advantage of the success of those magazines.<sup>1</sup> He introduced prize schemes, and it is an interesting commentary on both the man and the period that one of the most successful of these was two £30 a year scholarships for young people.<sup>2</sup> The later careers of the winners were carefully followed up and publicised.<sup>3</sup> When Mackintosh decided to export to the U.S.A., he introduced himself to that country as the "Toffee King" from Halifax, and was welcomed at New York harbour by a decorated tug boat.<sup>4</sup>

It is proposed at this point to proceed from a discussion of individual firms to an analysis of the "Victorian" staple trades, and the impact the decline of these had on the towns in which they were situated. The success with which the economies of these four towns were modernised varied strikingly, and the differences must be explained. In addition it is important to make clear the contrast that occurred not only between North and South, but also between Halifax and Burnley, and between Ipswich and Luton. The Northern towns were very different from one another both in the problems they faced, and the solutions they adopted, and this is also true of the Southern towns. The interwar period was one in which local government was able to play a considerable part in the development of industry, and a secondary object of this chapter is to examine the impact of municipal government on the local economies.

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1. G.W.Crutchley, op. cit., p. 52.

2. Ibid., p. 49.

3. One obtained a B.Sc. degree; the other became Secretary to a Cabinet Minister. Ibid., p. 49.

4. Ibid., pp.92 - 95.

SECTION B: ECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE FOUR TOWNS: 1. BURNLEY

The dominating fact in the history of Burnley during the interwar period was the decline of the cotton industry. It affected virtually every other aspect of life in the town. It is proposed to put several questions about this decline. How sharp was it? What was done to remedy the defects of the industry? Why was a policy to attract new industries introduced so slowly? How successful was it?

Decline was very rapid, as the table below shows.

	<u>1919 - 1921</u>	<u>1936 - 1938</u>
Number of mills working <sup>1</sup>	145	90
Number of workers in cotton manufacture <sup>2</sup>	31,152	15,652
Number of looms <sup>3</sup>	110,418	72,539

Thus the industry was reduced by approximately half between the wars. Short of a national effort conducted by the Government to introduce new industries it is difficult to see what could have been done to replace the cotton industry. In addition to the decline of cotton, the next two industries in size, textile machinery engineering and mining, were also depressed for much of the period

Many commentators in Burnley analysed correctly why the cotton industry was in depression. The Burnley Express, between 1919 and 1923 was already suggesting the principal causes of the cotton depression. "The seriousness of the position becomes apparent when it is realised that Burnley's products are mainly for export to countries whose purchasing power depends very largely upon what they secure for their agricultural products."<sup>4</sup> If India "cannot sell her produce in an unsettled Europe [then she] cannot afford to buy cotton goods at three times pre-war price."<sup>5</sup> In

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1. Burnley Express, November 15, 1919, p.7, col.4; Ibid., January 1 1938, p.14, col.3.

2. Census 1921 Industry Tables, Table 4, p.356; Burnley Express, January 1, 1938, p.14, col.6. Excluding the unemployed.

3. Ibid., November 15, 1919, p.7, col.4; Ibid., January 1, 1938, p.14, col.3.

4. Ibid., December 29, 1923, p.16, col.2.

5. Ibid., December 13, 1922, p.4, col.7.

addition, there was the challenge from Japan: "some regard it lightly [but] there are others who look upon it as serious, particularly in view of the low wages paid the operatives."<sup>1</sup> Especially ominous was the "great bid" Japan was making "for Lancashire's trade in that country",<sup>2</sup> i.e. in India.

Burnley newspapers did not hesitate to point out the structural defects of the Lancashire cotton industry, which compared so unfavourably with rivals in Japan and America. There were too many firms (380 in Burnley and district<sup>3</sup>) producing too many different sorts of cloth (120 in 1919<sup>3</sup>). The machinery was old fashioned - in 1925, over 50% of the looms in the Burnley area were over thirty years old.<sup>4</sup> Mills were small. As late as 1930, the average number of looms per Burnley mill was 860, compared with 2 - 3,000 in the average American mill.<sup>5</sup> Labour was used lavishly - one weaver for every four looms in Lancashire, compared to one per 12 - 16 in Japan.<sup>6</sup> The conclusion was obvious, and the Burnley Express drew it as early as 1919: "The secret of Japanese success ... would appear to be close co-operation of the Government, banks, shipping companies, manufacturers, and merchants ... If the United Kingdom is to meet this intensified competition in the future, British capital and labour will be obliged to combine to secure the maximum output possible."<sup>7</sup> However, the editor of the paper doubted that such ideas would be adopted because of the "renowned conservatism of the cotton industry."<sup>8</sup>

Conservatism was not the only problem. For a decade, the industry as a whole could not believe that much of its trade had gone for good, and that without drastic reorganisation there was a danger of losing the rest. Moods of pessimism about cotton's future

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1. Burnley Express, March 1, 1919, p.7, col. 6.

2. Ibid., August 13, 1919, p.2, col.6.

3. Ibid., August 23, 1919, p.3. The 'district' included Padiham, Nelson and Colne.

4. Ibid., March 21, 1925, p.16, col.2.

5. Economist, May 10, 1930, p.1043.

6. Ibid., April 25, 1931, p.888.

7. Burnley Express, August 13, 1919, p.2, col.6.

8. Ibid., May 28, 1919, p.2, col.5.

alternated with bouts of optimism, and derived from the sharp fluctuations in the industry's prosperity in the twenties. One example can be obtained from the Burnley News. At the start of 1927, the paper's leader commented "there is a growing feeling, even amongst those who were at first inclined to scoff, that Mr.J.M.Keynes was right in his conclusion that a great part of the trade of Lancashire was permanently lost, and that only drastic organisation could save the cotton industry from ruin."<sup>1</sup> Yet only six months later, officials of Burnley Weavers' Association who were visiting India were reported as having "no fear for the future of the Lancashire textile industry, our final conclusion being that taking every circumstance into consideration Lancashire can compete successfully with her competitors and will retain her position as the premier cloth-producing country in the world."<sup>2</sup> The contrast between such remarks reflects firstly the difficulty people had in accepting that the cotton industry, which had been so prosperous for so long, should be declining, and secondly the large fluctuations from year to year in prosperity. For example in December 1920, 65% of Burnley cotton weavers were out of work;<sup>3</sup> whereas in January 1925, only 44 Burnley weavers were unemployed.<sup>4</sup> It is fair to say, however, that periods of poor employment far exceeded in duration those of prosperity, and that as the years passed, the good spells grew shorter and shorter. By 1929, hope had worn thin, and the Burnley News cotton correspondent wrote in the paper's last edition of that year: "the unjustified optimism of the first half of the present decade is gone. In its place a pessimism and hopelessness, if anything more dangerous, is taking hold of

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1. Burnley News, January 1, 1927, p.9, col.1.

2. Ibid., June 29, 1927, p.5, col.4. Such optimistic feelings were not confined to Lancashire. Cf. the Economist, January 26, 1929, p.151: "There is ground for believing that manufacturers of cloth in 1929 will have the best year since 1920."

3. Burnley Express, December 8, 1920, p.6, col.1.

4. Ibid., January 28, 1925, p.8, col.1.

those engaged and employed in the industry."<sup>1</sup>

It was this pessimism and hopelessness that at last provoked the manufacturers to try to take action to remedy the defects of the industry. Previously, their individualism, conservatism and obstinate pride had prevented anything important being done. Efforts by comparatively far-sighted men such as Alderman Grey of Burnley to move the cotton industry had got nowhere. He had written to the Manchester Guardian in 1928 suggesting that only by the adoption of Japanese methods - bulk production, mass marketing, combination of effort and cheap labour - could the industry win back its markets. "We have wasted six precious years hoping and believing [the trade] would come back. It has not done so, and along present lines there is little likelihood that it will."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, such appeals - implying the sacrifice of the manufacturers' independence - fell on deaf ears. Only the talk of cheap labour got any response. It was around this subject that the greatest crisis of the cotton industry occurred, one that convinced many Burnley people, mainly cotton operatives but including significant numbers of the town's political leaders, that the cotton industry had passed beyond hope, and that new industries must be brought to the town.

The key issue was the desire of the millowners to reduce costs by economising on labour. This could be done in one of two ways: by introducing automatic looms or by making each man supervise more looms. Neither solution was new - automatic looms had been in use in the U.S.A. since the 1900's. The Burnley News found it "symptomatic of British Conservatism" that

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1. Burnley News, December 28, 1929, p.9.

2. Ibid., January 30, 1929, p.8, col.2.

the inventors of the Jackson-Northrop automatic loom were Britons who had "had to go to the States to get their inventions floated, being unable to interest anyone on this side in their ideas."<sup>1</sup> By 1924, one of Burnley's textile machinery manufacturers was able to offer automatic looms for sale.<sup>2</sup> An experiment in employing more looms per weaver had been tried before the war but had been abandoned because of disagreements about payment.<sup>3</sup> The tragedy of the situation was that the cotton employers, by being prodigal of labour in prosperous times, had stored up the task of raising productivity per man to a period of severe depression, which made it inevitable that the unions would fight the attempt.

The employers opted for the more looms system in preference to automatics, because the latter would involve them in expensive new investment which they could not afford. An experiment in using more looms per weaver was tried in ten Burnley mills in 1929. It was a success - the weavers earned more, and the employers calculated that they still saved approximately 20 - 30% of the total wage bill.<sup>4</sup> Consequently the millowners were determined to introduce it on a large scale. But when the unions worked out the implications of the new system - that if all Burnley mills went over to eight looms per weaver, some 7,500 operatives would lose their jobs<sup>5</sup> - they determined on opposition. They had no alternative policy apart from a vague combination of fatalism and utopianism. Burnley Trades and Labour Council, which was dominated by weavers, reported that "we attach no significance to most of what has been, and is being, and will be said, about the automatic loom, for if all countries engaged in the textile

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1. Burnley News, September 12, 1928, p.4, col.3.

2. Burnley Express, December 6, 1924, p.11.

3. Burnley News, April 24, 1929, p.8, col.1.

4. Board of Trade, An Industrial Survey of the Lancashire Area (excluding Merseyside) made for the Board of Trade by the University of Manchester (1932), p. 139.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 18.



industry were running automatic looms, the problem of depression, unemployment and poverty would still be with us ... what we should desire to see is a real International Cotton Congress to consider fully the world position of the textile industry and make arrangements for a system of international co-operation instead of the present ruinous competition, with suitable guarantees for the welfare of the workers in each country."<sup>1</sup> They did not explain how they proposed to persuade the Japanese millowners to participate.

Deadlock between the two sides resulted in an announcement by one Burnley cotton firm - Spencer's - that they were going to introduce the eight loom per weaver system without taking account of the views of either the Employers Association or the Unions.<sup>2</sup> It seems clear that this was regarded by both sides as a test case. If Spencer succeeded, other mills would follow. Consequently, the union had to defeat him. The result was a strike, with at one stage every Burnley mill closed.<sup>3</sup> The struggle was destined to be bitter and long, the great majority of weavers were "in an uncompromising mood."<sup>4</sup> The solidarity of the workers was remarkable: weavers struck even in mills where employers were content to carry on working the old system.<sup>5</sup> But the millowners were no less determined.

The millowners' triumph took two years - from January 1931 to January 1933 - to complete. The cotton industry was consequently unable to obtain much advantage from the devaluation of 1931. But far more serious than this was the possibility of a breakdown of law and order in Burnley. At times things were touch and go. There was "a very hostile demonstration against Mr. Spencer"<sup>6</sup>;

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1. Burnley News, September 28, 1929, p.10, col.2.

2. Burnley Express, March 21, 1931, p. 16.

3. Daily Express, July 28, 1932, p.7, col.2.

4. Burnley Express, January 28, 1931, p.4, col.3. Eighty per cent of the members of Burnley Weavers Association voted against the employers' proposals for the eight loom system in 1930. Burnley News, March 29, 1930, p.16, col.1. One weaver said "there's a lot of us under the impression that all this eight-loom business is mere camouflage to cover a reduction in wages." Burnley News, January 10, 1931, p.9, col.5.

5. Economist, July 30, 1932, p.220.

6. Burnley Express, March 25, 1931, p.8, col.2.

on another occasion a mob of 3,000 people outside his home had to be cleared by police baton charges;<sup>1</sup> on yet another, "a number of people went to the home of one of the men who was working ... , and after creating a disturbance left after kicking the house door in. The man ... did not report for duty" the next day.<sup>2</sup>

That the riots were not more serious was due to several factors. Firstly, the Labour party and the Trades Unions, both led by moderates, were in control of the situation. Secondly, the working class of Burnley, even during a period of acute crisis, was not revolutionary, as the mere 512 votes polled by the Communist candidate in the election of 1931 demonstrates.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, there appears to have been a growing feeling that there was not very much either side could do about cotton, that the industry was finished, and that the best thing to do was to get out of Burnley. During the following eight years approximately 13,000 people left the town.

The crisis convinced many people that new policies were needed if Burnley was to survive. The Editor of the Burnley Express summed this feeling up: "As things are, the ground that has been lost can never be regained. Many people who have been in cotton all their lives will never be employed in the industry again. It emphasises the point that new businesses ... are urgently needed if the future is to be viewed with confidence."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the nadir of the industry in terms of popular esteem was reached in 1938 when a group of Labour councillors tried to get cotton classed as a "blind-alley occupation".<sup>5</sup> The practical effect of this would have been slight,<sup>6</sup> but its symbolic importance was considerable. It showed how cotton had been transformed in the esteem of many Burnley

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1. Burnley Express, September 30, 1931, p.8, col.2.

2. Ibid., March 28, 1931, p.18, col.1.

3. F.W.S.Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949(1969), p.111.

4. Burnley Express, November 10, 1934, p.11, col.5.

5. Ibid., December 17, 1938, p.5, col.3. They were unsuccessful.

6. Exemptions to staying at school until the age of 15 would not be allowed for young people seeking to enter the cotton industry. Ibid., December 17, 1938, p.5.

people from an industry where "a boy could learn cotton weaving and finish up as a manufacturer and owner of a mill" to one which had become "a hopeless and despairing occupation."<sup>1</sup>

It was not a fair picture. Admittedly, the cotton industry had been reduced in size by half, but the remainder was soundly based, with a promising future which was to last a further twenty years. Millowners who survived did so by pioneering new lines of production, concentrating on "special" makes of cotton for the domestic market, modernising their equipment, and raising productivity per man. They also paid comparatively good wages. The elimination of the inefficient mills, the producers of the cheap "grey" cloths that were manufactured more cheaply in Japan and India, and the old fashioned entrepreneur<sup>en</sup> who paid low wages and operated his mills in bad conditions was a loss to the employment of Burnley but it was no loss to the cotton industry. The remaining millowners were able in the mid and late 1930's to make use of the opportunities the sharp reduction in capacity provided, and to make fair, if not outstanding profits.

But for the fifty per cent of the Burnley cotton operatives of 1920 who had seen their jobs vanish, what alternatives were there? The next largest industries in terms of employment - mining and textile machinery manufacture - were also in depression for much of the period. The latter was disrupted by the unloading of second-hand machinery from bankrupt mills onto the market: in 1928, whereas a new loom cost £17.10s., a second-hand loom could be bought for as little as 30s.<sup>2</sup> Nor was there much to be hoped from mining. There was a sharp improvement in the industry's fortunes during the mid-1930's, to the extent that by December

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1. Burnley Express, December 17, 1938, p.5, col.3.

2. Burnley News, November 17, 1928, p.6, col.2.

1937, only 8% of the miners in Burnley were still unemployed,<sup>1</sup> and many of these latter were men in advanced middle age who had lost the strength and fitness to get a job in the pits. New recruits to the industry however did not come from the unemployed, but from the sons of miners. Employment in this industry in Burnley, as in many other mining areas, tended to "remain in families."<sup>2</sup>

So fresh industries had to be found. Fortunately for Burnley, it was exceptional among medium-sized Lancashire towns in that it had experienced real growth during the 1920's in industries apart from textiles.

TABLE 2.4: BURNLEY: PERCENTAGE INCREASE 1923 - 1929 OF INSURED EMPLOYED PERSONS IN ALL INDUSTRIES OTHER THAN COTTON AND TEXTILE FINISHING.<sup>3</sup>

BLACKBURN	- 0.1	BURNLEY	+ 6.2
BOLTON AND LEIGH	- 3.8	ST.HELENS	+ 2.7
ATHERTON AND WIGAN	- 25.1	BURY	+ 1.4

Two branches were particularly promising: domestic utensils and clothing. However, although both were expanding rapidly, the manufacture of domestic utensils was highly capital intensive. For example, W.H.Dean, Sheet Metal workers, moved a department from Birmingham to Burnley. This cost £10,000 to set up but provided work for only 40 to 50 workers.<sup>4</sup> Clothing was labour intensive but was not expanding nearly fast enough to take up the slack in employment left by the depression in the cotton industry. It is perhaps significant that most of the firms moving to Burnley in the 1930's were in the same two sectors of the economy. It would appear that to firms wishing to expand the fact that similar industries were already flourishing in the town was at least as

1. Burnley Express, January 1, 1938, p.14, col.6.

2. Ibid., February 16, 1938, p.5, col.4.

3. Board of Trade, Industrial Survey of Lancashire, p. 93.

4. Burnley Express, April 25, 1936, p.20, col.5.

important as the incentives offered by Burnley Council.

How did Burnley Council set out to attract new industries? In the twenties, the policy had been to advertise the town's advantages, but without much success.<sup>1</sup> More aggressive action was needed. The council's problem was that they had few precedents to go on. Government attitudes seemed to rule out extraordinary initiatives. The Special Areas Legislation produced very little and Burnley was not even included in one of these. Nor did rearmament bring very much benefit to the town.<sup>2</sup>

The acute nature of the depression appears to have made Burnley Council much more receptive to radical proposals for work-creating schemes. The cotton crisis of 1931 to 1933 caused some of the leading Conservatives and Liberals in the town to doubt the orthodox views about economic growth, and to decide that the market forces must be influenced directly. Keynes's views on the causes of the depression in cotton were known in Burnley, and the local Liberal party had campaigned in 1929 on the platform of the Liberal Yellow Book. The Burnley New Industries programme may be said to represent one of the first attempts in Britain at pump-priming in the Keynesian manner. The turning point came when Labour gained control of the council in 1934. In most respects the Labour party did not contribute much that was new to the way Burnley council operated, but the policy to attract new industries was an exception. A committee of three was elected, including Parkinson, one of the leading Conservative councillors, which acted with great energy, touring the country, interviewing directors, and inviting them to the town. It bought cotton mills, and converted them for new industries, but the first firms which moved to

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1. Advertising campaigns were continued into the 1930's, growing in expense. The sum of £1,000 was allocated to advertising Burnley in 1934 - 1935. Burnley Express, January 27, 1934, p.18, col.1.
  2. In the first seven months of 1936, 4,000 contracts were awarded but only ten of them went to the weaving area of Lancashire. Ibid., December 5, 1936, p. 20, col. 3.

Burnley employed mainly women and juveniles. A major initiative was needed, so the council built an advance factory for £90,000,<sup>1</sup> taking the total expenditure on the New Industries programme upto £200,000. The annual expenditure of the council was increased by almost 60%, much of it by borrowing. By the summer of 1939, ten new firms employing some 3,100 persons had moved to the town.<sup>2</sup> Nine of these made clothing and allied products, three of them being branches of Continental firms.<sup>3</sup> The tenth was Platers and Stampers, later Prestige, an American manufacturer of kitchen utensils, which took over the advance factory, employing 500 men.<sup>4</sup> This was a major development, but much of its importance was psychological: it helped to persuade a town that seemed to have lost its self confidence that it was "still a factor to be reckoned with in the sphere of industry and will continue to figure prominently on the industrial map."<sup>5</sup> When the King and Queen visited Burnley in May 1938, a main item on their itinerary was a tour of the new factory.<sup>6</sup>

How far did the New Industries programme transform Burnley's industrial situation? It seems unlikely that the committee could have persuaded enough firms to move to Burnley to absorb all the unemployed - it took four years to provide work for less than a third of them, and after 1937 the committee was hamstrung because the Ministry of Health removed its special powers. However, it is fair to say that the programme did provide a considerable boost to the transformation of the town's industrial base which had begun in the early twenties, and which the Second World War - making the South for the first time in two decades highly unattractive to industrialists - was to complete.

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1. Burnley Express, January 1, 1938, p.12, col.2.

2. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1938, p.14, col.6; July 28, 1937, p.8, cols. 1 - 2; June 29, 1938, p.8, col.1.

3. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1938, p. 14.

4. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1937, p.8. col.1.

5. *Ibid.*, January 15, 1938, p.6.

6. *Ibid.*, May 18, 1938, pp.6, 7, 10.

SECTION B: ECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE FOUR TOWNS: 2. HALIFAX

There were two main trends in the economic history of Halifax during the interwar period: firstly, its unemployment totals from 1934 onwards were amongst the lowest in the North of England. Secondly, this comparatively successful record was achieved without very much change in the methods and organisation of most of Halifax industry. The recovery in employment in Halifax after 1933 did not take place on the basis of a re-organisation of industry such as occurred in Ipswich. The purpose of this section of the chapter is to enquire why this was so.

The conventional picture many people in Halifax had of the local economy during this period was that it had a "great variety of trades ... numbering probably over a hundred,"<sup>1</sup> whose diversity ensured that there would never be a serious depression because it was highly improbable that all these industries would slump at the same time. This view was zealously propagated in both the council and the Chamber of Commerce, and its general acceptance explains much of the complacency that prevailed in the town during the interwar period. But the view was a myth nonetheless. In fact, Halifax had only three industries of importance: manufacture of woollens and worsteds, of carpets, and engineering,<sup>2</sup> which dominated the town's economy, and accounted for 40.5% of workers in 1921, and 51% of the insured labour force in 1935.<sup>3</sup> All three could be and were simultaneously depressed, from 1921 to 1924, and again from 1929 to 1933, during both of which periods, unemployment rose above 20% of the town's labour force.

Engineering in both periods suffered from the general downturn in the economy which caused a falling off in demand by

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1. Halifax Corporation, Halifax: Commercially Considered (1928), pp. 1 - 2.

2. I.e. Code numbers 141, 150-152, 154, 156-159.

3. Census 1921 Industry Tables, Table 4.

J.H.Richardson, Industrial Employment and Unemployment in West Yorkshire, pp. 134 - 138.

industry for producer's goods, and particularly for machine tools. In the earlier period, this general economic problem was exacerbated by competition caused by the Government selling surplus stock that it had bought during the war, and machine tool manufacturers claimed that this was still affecting production as late as 1925.<sup>1</sup> Some manufacturers argued that the depression was the worst within living memory, and one, who believed his experience was paralleled by most other engineering companies in Halifax, said in 1927 that his firm had made losses in every year since the end of 1921. He had survived by living off the profits made during 1920 and 1921.<sup>2</sup>

The problems of the carpet industry were brought about by changes in tariff policy abroad, combined with a reduction in domestic demand caused by the depression in the early 1920's. Of the two, the developments overseas were the most important. One of Crossley's major pre-war markets - Russia - was now completely closed to the company<sup>3</sup>, and elsewhere, there was severe competition from the French and American carpet industries, whilst several European countries eliminated imports of British carpets by imposing tariffs.<sup>4</sup> Unemployment and short time working at home "crippled" the demand for the cheaper grades of carpet.<sup>5</sup>

However, it was the woollen industry that was the most depressed. Even in the more prosperous years of the 1920's such as 1928, short time working and poor profits still plagued the industry.<sup>6</sup> Impoverishment overseas, in Europe and the Far East especially, was blamed for the loss of markets<sup>7</sup> and fashion changes at home for the decline in domestic demand.<sup>8</sup>

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1. The Halifax Courier and Guardian, December 24, 1925, p.7, col.2.
  2. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, January 1927, p.17.
  3. Ibid., January 1922, p. 19.
  4. Halifax Courier and Guardian, December 29, 1928, p. 5, col. 1.
  5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 28, 1925, p. 7, col.5.
  6. Halifax Courier and Guardian, December 29, 1928, p.5, col.1.
  7. Ibid., December 24, 1925, p.7, col.1.
  8. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, October 1928, p. 101.



Thus, for much of the 1920's, the principal Halifax industries were confronted with serious problems of readjustment. Their difficulties were compounded by the structure that they had inherited from the Victorian era. There was an almost anarchic confusion of firms in woollens and worsteds. In 1927, The Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal recorded 147 companies in this group.<sup>1</sup> There was no consultation or co-operation amongst them about advertising methods, marketing, the organisation of research etc., - indeed there was active opposition to any proposal to introduce such co-operation. Criticisms of the contemporary organisation (or lack of it) in the woollen industry were as plentiful and accurate, and as unfruitful, as those launched upon the cotton manufacturers of Burnley. One millowner claimed that "methods of production of this country in textiles have not shown any substantial progress for at least a quarter of a century."<sup>2</sup> Another pointed out that the Halifax industry was dropping behind its international competitors, and put the blame on the lack of scientific and technical training compared with the foreigners.<sup>3</sup> A third wanted textile science to become a profession whereby "the captain of the industry in the future could qualify for a degree showing that he had a thorough grasp and knowledge of the work."<sup>4</sup> Still others argued in favour of reorganisation of production. Textile firms were "continually changing their looms for other coloured material and other designs. Is it not possible for firms to agree one with another to produce, say, one firm blue serge, another browns, another greys, and so on, and pool the results?"<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, it was not; nor did it prove

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, April 1927, pp. 41 - 2.

2. Ibid., May 1927, p. 51.

3. Ibid., May 1924, p.61.

4. Ibid., December 1924, p. 4.

5. Ibid., July 1927, p. 77.

possible to adopt any of the other proposals, even though they were made by people inside the industry. The fate of ideas about co-operation in research has been described above. Those for improved methods of marketing (the manufacturers "must not only sell but must enquire strenuously all over the world what a certain market wants"<sup>1</sup>) were defeated because manufacturers were reluctant to respond to the requirements of fashion. They rebelled against taking on the role of mere cloth providers for "the girl or woman ... who has nothing better to do than have a fresh dress for every function."<sup>2</sup> Co-operation to prevent cut-throat competition was not attempted. The 1930's, like the 1920's, were remembered "as a sorry period of price-cutting and other forms of unhealthy competition."<sup>3</sup> The result was that "profit margins on worsted yarns [were] either non-existent or ... below a reasonable or commonsense level."<sup>4</sup>

Only one proposal for change genuinely appealed to the majority of Halifax manufacturers. The President of Halifax Chamber of Commerce declared "we were beaten because France had lower wages and worked longer hours."<sup>5</sup> The remedy, whether dressed up in complicated plans for "fairly and squarely ... reviewed" alterations in the number of hours worked,<sup>6</sup> or put forward baldly as a demand for a wage reduction, was applied, but after 1925 even the manufacturers were doubtful how much more saving could be obtained from this source.<sup>7</sup>

The structural problems of the engineering industry were in many ways similar to those in textiles. There were 63 separate firms in engineering in 1927<sup>8</sup>. The problems caused by intensive competition were not solved;<sup>9</sup> most firms were not prepared to

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, September 1926, p. 99.

2. Ibid., October 1928, p. 101.

3. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 20, 1937, p.9, col.2.

4. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, February 18, 1938, p.5, col.3.

5. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, December 1924, p.4. A later President, Clay, a worsted manufacturer, said "we have to face the advantage a Continental manufacturer has in the matter of longer hours work" (sic). Ibid., December 1926, p.1.

6. Ibid., December 1926, p.1.

7. Ibid., April 1925, p.47.

8. Ibid., April 1927, pp. 41 - 2.

9. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, July 21, 1930, p.5, col.5.

sacrifice their independence in schemes for co-operative production. Why did the two principal industries in Halifax show so little enthusiasm for improving their methods and organisation? Firstly, the economic crises of 1921 - 1924 and 1929 - 1933 did not force a rethinking of their business philosophy because both were periods of general depression in the country, and both were followed by fairly rapid recoveries, especially after 1933. The 1930's boom, combined with the effects of rearmament, turned the Halifax engineering industry round. The woollen industry was less prosperous: employment did not regain its 1920's levels, even though the earlier period was a depressed decade for this industry. Yet woollens and worsteds were able to survive because there was some growth in home demand to compensate for the decline in exports. The depression was never so deep as to force a drastic reorganisation of the type that took place in the Burnley cotton industry. Reform on the relatively mild lines described above failed because of the difficulties of persuading 50 engineers or 130 textile manufacturers to co-operate. A <sup>e</sup>determined minority could easily disrupt many of the proposals. Others were not approved because they were comparatively expensive, and in a period of low profits, many firms felt they could not afford them.

There was no sense of common interest amongst these men. It was a comparatively easy task to persuade half a dozen Ipswich engineers to co-operate, when all of them knew the others well, and when there was little direct competition between them. These men formed a pressure group which was able to achieve striking successes - the pressure brought in favour of docks development in the early 1920's was one of the principal examples. But in Halifax, both the textile and the engineering entrepreneurs were in sharp

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competition with one another - there were allegations that some were unscrupulous in their business methods<sup>1</sup> - and these differences splintered the industry.

Thirdly, most of the firms in both industries were private companies, dominated often by one man, and they placed very great value on their independence. They were not prepared to abandon family control. They were men with very narrow, if deep, experience, because the great majority had worked only for one firm - their own. Nor was this a reason for regret amongst them - indeed, it was considered "a great advantage" rather than the opposite to have "gone through the shop".<sup>2</sup> Consequently, these men did not have the comparatively wide range of experience that accrued to the manager who had worked in several industries, and who might have acquired in his progress through them knowledge of new industrial techniques or of the variety of expertises in accounting, marketing, advertising, etc., that were becoming available during the interwar period. Too often the Halifax entrepreneur had to provide all the managerial skills himself, at a time when business methods were becoming increasingly complex and specialised. Ignorant of, or doubtful about, the new techniques, he could not see the point of amalgamations or co-operation that would enable some of them at least to be brought into practise.

Finally, most Halifax companies were under no real pressure to reorganise if they failed to produce profits. It is possible that many of these companies were operating at a very low level of profitability during this period. Records are not generally available for private companies, but the publicly owned companies in engineering and textiles were not making high profits, and it

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1. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 20, 1937, p.9, col.2.

2. Halifax Corporation, Halifax: Commercially Considered, p.4.

seems improbable that the majority of private concerns were faring much better. Drakes (engineering) with £65,000 issued capital in 1938 made an average net profit in 1936 - 37 (which were good years for the engineering industry) of £6,744.<sup>1</sup> A second engineering company, Hartley and Sugden (issued capital £70,540 in 1925)<sup>2</sup> made an average net profit of £4,335 between 1925 and 1931, and only an average of £1,887 between 1932 and 1938.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Standeven's, a woollen textile company with an issued capital of £150,000, and perhaps the most ably run wool firm in Halifax, produced a no more than adequate average profit of £10,570 in 1938 and 1939.<sup>3</sup> Such companies were subject to public scrutiny and to public pressure. Managements were obliged to inform shareholders what they were doing, and through the medium of company meetings were available for criticism if they were unsuccessful. The private companies, and especially those controlled by one man, were not vulnerable to these pressures. That public knowledge of what a firm was doing, or failing to do, could have an impact on its policies is illustrated by the pressures brought to bear on the Crossley carpet company.

This firm reacted sluggishly to the changed conditions of the interwar period. Profits in the late 1920's were always low, and in some years (1926, 1931) there were losses.<sup>4</sup> Unprofitable lines (such as the manufacture of yarn) were not abandoned, whilst the amount of money put into the reserves was small (only £30,000 out of profits of £377,800 between 1919 and 1924)<sup>5</sup> so that the company did not have adequate finance to reorganise its production away from exports to lines that were selling well at home. The responsibility lay with the management. The Chairman at the start

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 7, 1938, p.5, col.3.  
The Stock Exchange Official Year-Book 1938, p. 2845.

2. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Hartley and Sugden, Balance Sheet, 1925 - 1930; Report of the Directors, 1931 - 1938; File No. 12651, Vols. 1, 2.

3. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, J.Standeven Co.Ltd., Report of the Directors, 1938, 1939, File No. 193011, Vol. 1.

4. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 14, 1927, p.3, col.3.

5. Halifax Courier and Guardian, January 24, 1925, p.2, col.7.

of the period was too old (he was an Italian, Marchetti, who had served in his youth with Garibaldi) and too conservative. He was a staunch opponent of new methods: for example, he opposed the company advertising its products on the grounds that if one did so, all would follow, and no-one would gain; his policy was followed by his successors on the Board of Crossley's.<sup>1</sup> Such an attitude was all the more alarming when compared with the advertising triumphs of Marchetti's contemporary, John Mackintosh. The Directors' policies were criticised at annual meetings of shareholders,<sup>1</sup> and one Chairman, F. Crossley, resigned after he had announced that the company had lost £50,000 in 1931.<sup>1</sup> Crossley was a member of the family which had founded the firm. He also farmed the estates the family had acquired in East Anglia, and seems to have been unable to decide whether he preferred being a managing director or a gentleman farmer, and wasted much time travelling between Halifax and Suffolk. Thereafter, a new management, aided by a more favourable economic situation, was able to turn the company round.<sup>2</sup> Like several of the other prosperous companies in Burnley and Halifax, Crossley's became a supplier of components for the car industry.<sup>3</sup> By the mid-1930's, profits were exceeding the levels they had held in the early 1920's.<sup>4</sup>

There was a similar series of events at the sluggish Asquith engineering company. A period of poor management<sup>5</sup> led to "drastic changes in the directorate and management" in January 1937 brought about by pressure from "certain large shareholders".<sup>6</sup> By the end of 1938, the new management had turned a net loss of nearly £60,000 into a net profit of over £100,000, and the company paid its first

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 24, 1930, p.5, col.5; January 29, 1931, p.3, col. 3.

2. Ibid., January 19, 1938, p.5, col.5.

3. Investors' Chronicle, March 20, 1937, p.745.

4. Halifax Courier and Guardian, January 23, 1937, p.12, col.2.

5. The Asquith Group, Production News, Jan/June 1965, pp. 6 - 7.

6. Investors' Chronicle, August 14, 1937, pp. 406 - 7.

ordinary dividend since 1920.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for the Halifax engineering and textile industries, economic conditions in the 1930's were prosperous enough for the great majority of companies to survive, though few gave evidence of having learned the lessons of the lean years before 1934. Not many imitated the example of the Butler Machine Tool Company which became a public company in 1935. Most still feared dilution of control and were reluctant to change their traditional ways. The risks involved in remaining a small private firm - amply illustrated by the experience of the cotton industry in their own town and nearby Burnley - were ignored. The crisis of readjustment was not avoided, however, but was stored up for the future, and the years after the Second World War were to witness severe problems in both the main industries of Halifax.

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1. Investors' Chronicle, October 22, 1938, p. 806.

SECTION B: ECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE FOUR TOWNS: 3. IPSWICH

This discussion of the economy of Ipswich during the interwar period seeks to develop two main arguments about industrial progress in the town: firstly, its growth between 1919 and 1939 was by no means certain - many were pessimistic about the future at the end of the Great War - and a major factor creating the boom that did occur was the direct intervention of the Docks Commission and the Borough Council, who combined to improve the town's trading facilities. Secondly, it will be argued that the economy of Ipswich, unlike that of Halifax, underwent a fundamental re-structuring during these decades, and that the unemployment figures for the town give a misleading impression of the importance of the changes that were taking place.

The pessimism in Ipswich about the future at the start of the interwar period had its origins in geographical, economic and political factors. People in the town felt it to be remote, because it had poor communications with the advanced industrial areas of the country such as the Midlands and the North. There were few markets in East Anglia to stimulate the Ipswich engineering industries, and the producers' goods sector was felt to be at a particular disadvantage compared with competitors who were nearer the main British markets. One Ipswich journalist feared that trade would be lost to towns "much more favourably placed"<sup>1</sup> than Ipswich, and he predicted a rosy future for places like Wigan, Bradford and Leeds. He argued that Ipswich must pioneer fresh lines of production. New industries should be brought to the town, and especially those manufacturing consumer durables such as gramophones, watches, and clocks. The problem was how to

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1. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, August 29, 1919, p.11, col.5.



make the town attractive to such companies, and to encourage those that were already there to expand. The difficulty Ipswich faced in achieving this was increased by a political factor: the growth and radicalisation of the trades unions in the town during the First World War. Before the war, Ipswich's remoteness from the industrial areas of the Midlands and North, and the long depression in the agricultural machinery industry had caused wages in the town to be lower than in the engineering industry elsewhere in the country.<sup>1</sup> The unions in the town were small and weak: the trades council had only <sup>some</sup> 5,000 members in 1915.<sup>2</sup> During the war, however, Ipswich unions had taken advantage of the shortage of labour and the great demands of the war economy to force substantial wage increases, and thereby attract new members. For example, one union, which had failed to win a 2d. an hour wage rise in May 1917 had so strengthened its bargaining power by December that it forced a three week strike and secured a 1s. an hour pay increase.<sup>3</sup> Successful industrial action - and there were many examples of this in Ipswich between 1917 and 1920<sup>4</sup> - was accompanied by radical political demands. A gloomy future was predicted by some authorities<sup>1</sup> for the engineering industry in Ipswich on the grounds that the workers, by their wage demands, were pricing the industry out of the market.

In this unpromising situation, many people in the town looked to the public authorities to improve Ipswich's industrial prospects. They launched two initiatives designed to improve the railways and the docks. As regards the railways, the campaign was a failure. The council endeavoured to persuade the L.N.E.R. to improve the railway connections with London by widening the line

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1. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, August 29, 1919, p. 11, col.5.

2. R.Pope and F.W.A.Skerritt, Ipswich and District Trades Council 1885 - 1967 (1969), p. 11.

3. R.Ratcliffe, History of the Working Class Movement in Ipswich (Typescript, Ipswich Library, undated), Vol. II, p. 147.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 147 - 161.

R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 4 - 5, pp. 21 - 2.

and providing an additional station nearer the town's industrial area. The main station was in an unsatisfactory position on the outskirts of the town. The council got nowhere with this campaign, the L.N.E.R. eventually turned down its proposals on the scarcely comforting ground that Ipswich was not yet sufficiently developed industrially to justify expensive railway improvements.<sup>1</sup>

More successful, and of crucial importance to the development of Ipswich during the interwar period, was the modernisation of the docks. Expansion of Ipswich docks had been mooted before World War I but the plans were postponed for the duration of the war. In 1919, they were revived, and in 1922, the Docks' Commissioners and the Council agreed on some form of dock improvement. The question was how big the modernisation should be? In favour of a particularly ambitious scheme was an alliance of the largest employers in Ipswich, with the Labour party and the trades unions. The former argued that the port facilities of the town were totally inadequate: at that time, the largest vessels afloat had to unload six miles downstream from Ipswich.<sup>2</sup> They demanded that the docks be expanded to take all sizes of ship, and were supported by the Labour Movement because a bold scheme of public works in the docks would provide work at a time when unemployment was growing fast.<sup>3</sup> The opposition, consisting of many ratepayers led by small businessmen, argued in favour of a modest scheme (and if possible no scheme at all), because they feared the expense of anything larger, and wished to keep the rates low during a period of poor trade.<sup>4</sup>

The "big docks" advocates received a boost when the Inquiry team invited to report on the various proposals by the Docks'

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, February 14, 1924, p.8, col.2.

2. Ibid., July 17, 1922, p.7.

3. Ibid., January 20, 1922, p.7, cols. 6 - 7.

4. Ibid., September 22, 1922, p.5, col.4.

Commissioners came down on their side. They made three points about dock development. Firstly, failure to take action was already deterring several firms which had considered moving to the town from doing so. Secondly, extending the quays would open up dockside land to industrial development for firms in the import-export trade. Thirdly, if the docks were developed, they would stand a good chance of competing for the trade of the Port of London. On this point, the Inquiry team concluded that "it is significant that ... ports within 60 or 70 miles of London, have shown progress greater than that of the Port of London itself. Ipswich, though possessing geographically all the essentials of being one of those feeders, has hitherto failed to fulfill this function by reason of its inferior facilities."<sup>1</sup> This put the ball firmly in the Docks' Commissioners court, but they failed to respond. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman resigned, after the Board had refused to come to a decision about the report.<sup>2</sup> The difficulty was that whereas the opponents of the scheme were united, its supporters were divided, following the employers' assault upon their employees' wages in 1922. Although the Commission as such was not vulnerable to electoral pressure, a substantial number of its members were Ipswich Borough councillors,<sup>3</sup> and the cost of the improvements (estimated at £265,000<sup>4</sup>), deterred some of them. They drew up a compromise scheme which to the Editor of the East Anglian Daily Times seemed "as timid as the schemes of 1913 and 1918 were bold"<sup>5</sup>. The unambitious nature of this proposal, reflecting the fears of its advocates (who were led by two small businessmen from Ipswich) that the cost of a large scheme would place too great a financial burden on the town<sup>6</sup>,

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, July 17, 1922, p.7, col.6.

2. Ibid., September 15, 1922, p.6, cols. 4-5; p.7, col.1.

3. Ipswich Council had seven representatives on the Docks' Commission of 19; of the others, three were appointed by East Suffolk C.C., three by payers of dues on vessels, and six by payers of rates on goods. Ipswich, Official Handbook(undated, c. 1951), p.104.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, July 17, 1922, p. 7.

5. Ibid., September 7, 1922, p.6, col.4.

6. Ibid., September 22, 1922, p.5, col.4.

infuriated both the industrialists and the unions, who temporarily united. A new Chairman, Packard, the fertiliser manufacturer, was elected. He favoured the big scheme<sup>1</sup>, and work on the first stage was authorised almost immediately, financed by a loan of £125,000.<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-1930's, the quays had been extended by 1800 feet,<sup>3</sup> new docks constructed and linked to the railway system. Nearby, Ipswich Council built one of its new housing estates.

The docks modernisation was the boldest scheme introduced by any of the local authorities in the Southern towns, and was as fundamental in encouraging growth in Ipswich as the New Industries programme was in helping to transform Burnley's economy. Ipswich docks were now well placed to take an increasing share of the trade with the Continent, and this, combined with the town's position in the South East, made it attractive to industrialists looking for suitable sites to establish factories.

However, Ipswich's investment boom in the late 1920's and 1930's involved firms long established in the town as well as newcomers to it. In the former category were Churchman's Tobacco Company, which made three separate additions to its factories (in 1919, 1927, and 1928) and two to its offices (in 1935 and 1938).<sup>4</sup> The concentration by Fison's of superphosphate production at a dockside site has been described above. In addition, Fison's built new works for the production of sulphuric acid in 1934 (enlarged in 1938), and at the same time, a granulating plant - the first of its kind in England - was set up. By these developments, Fison's was replacing the 30 small units which the company controlled as a result of the mergers of the 1920's.<sup>5</sup> Nor were these firms

1. East Anglian Daily Times, September 30, 1922, p.4; October 6, 1922, p.5.

2. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1922, p.8, col. 1.

3. Ipswich, Official Handbook (c. 1951), p. 104.

4. R.A.N.Dixon, Ipswich Guide (c. 1948), pp. 109 - 110.

5. East Anglian Daily Times, October 14, 1938, p. 5.

exceptional in constructing on such a large scale. At least nine other Ipswich firms are recorded as having made major additions to plant.<sup>1</sup>

One important point of contrast between North and South is reflected in this programme of industrial modernisation carried out in Ipswich. Firms there were able to build on a large scale despite the interwar depression which affected many of them because they had substantial financial resources. Access to these was vital in the remodelling of many Ipswich industries away from exports to production for the home market. Had the main Ipswich engineering companies remained small by resisting mergers, it is questionable whether they could have survived the interwar period. Directors' reports tell the same tale: "Export has fallen to an almost negligible quantity" (Ransomes and Rapier)<sup>2</sup>; "It has only been possible to do a small proportion of the Company's normal Export Trade" (Ransomes, Sims, and Jefferies)<sup>3</sup>; "There is very little likelihood of substantial improvement in Foreign Markets in the near future" (Ransomes, Sims, and Jefferies).<sup>4</sup> The situation was saved, and one of the main reasons was that adequate finance enabled such companies to take advantage of the fact that the home trades "have shown substantial improvement" (Ransomes, Sims, and Jefferies).<sup>5</sup>

The late 1920's and 1930's saw major re-structuring of industry in Ipswich. In the absence of detailed statistics it is impossible to be certain of the exact extent of this, but a partial picture can be obtained from the records that are available. Firstly, the major engineering companies were slimming their labour forces in order to raise productivity per man. These companies, in terms of

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1. Details, foot-note 2, p. 66.

2. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Ransomes and Rapier Ltd., Report of the Directors, 1933, File No. 47585, Vol.2.

3. Ibid., Ransomes, Sims, and Jefferies Ltd., Directors' Report for the Year ended 31st. March, 1932, File No. 19802, Vol. 4.

4. Ibid., 1936.

5. Ibid., 1935.

organisation and profitability, were strengthened. Fresh investment took place even at the trough of the depression. One company for which records are fairly complete, with an issued capital of £125,000, and approximately 800 employees, made additions to land valued at £21,301, and to plant and machinery valued at £33,593 between 1929 and 1934.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the decline in the employment these firms offered was considerable. Figures are available for three of the eight major engineering companies in Ipswich, and they show a loss of some 2,300 jobs between the early 1920's and the late 1930's.<sup>2</sup> The problem that Ipswich faced resembled that of Burnley in the sense that the new firms that were moving to the docks area were capital intensive, and did not provide a great deal of fresh employment. Two of the larger developments - by Crane, and Manganese, Bronze and Brass - only provided some 700 jobs,<sup>3</sup> and many of these were not available until recovery got underway in the mid 1930's. The result of the productivity gains, the rapidity of employment decline in a large number of Ipswich industries, and the fairly slow employment growth in the new ones, was the substantial pool of unemployment of the early 1930's. This was a problem that was not to be satisfactorily solved till the impact of the Second World War caused a fresh expansion of the Ipswich engineering industry.

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1. D.T.I., Register of Business Names, Reavell and Co. Ltd., Balance Sheets, 1928 - 1938, File No. 57744, Vol.1. R.A.N.Dixon, Ipswich Guide (c.1948), p.105.

2. E.R.& F.Turner: East Anglian Daily Times, January 17, 1919, p.4, col.6; July 1, 1937, p.6.

W. Reavell: Ibid., January 21, 1919, p.4, col.6; R.A.N.Dixon, op. cit., p. 105.

Ransomes, Sims, and Jefferies Ltd.: Ipswich Engineering Society, op. cit., p. 61; Ipswich Corporation and the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce and Shipping, The Official Guide to Ipswich (Suffolk) (undated, c. 1926), p. 60.

3. Ipswich Engineering Society, op. cit., p. 114; R.A.N.Dixon, op. cit., p. 109.

SECTION B: ECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE FOUR TOWNS: 4. LUTON

Between 1919 and 1939, Luton was one of the fastest growing towns in England. It is sometimes assumed that there was an element of inevitability about its rapid growth. For example, F. Grundy and R.M. Titmuss suggest in their Report on Luton that "notwithstanding additions and developments, the Luton of 1939 was already moulded in 1914. As early as this, Luton had assumed its new industrial character."<sup>1</sup> It is true to say that Luton had advantages that were likely in combination to make it a promising centre for economic growth. It was less than forty miles from London. Flat land was plentiful and comparatively cheap during the early 1920's, the town's rates were not high, and the labour force was very weakly unionised. Luton had already attracted important industries before the Great War: such as Vauxhall's, Skefco, and Laporte Chemicals. Yet there is nothing in Luton's initial situation to explain why the town grew so fast - at double the rate similarly situated and advantaged towns grew during this period.<sup>2</sup>

The 1920's in particular was a very difficult decade for the town. The straw hat industry was in decline, and at the same time it was questionable whether several of the principal engineering companies would survive the slump - let alone expand sufficiently to take up the slack caused by the hat industry's depression, and in this respect, the town's economy resembled that of Burnley. Fears were expressed that the town was too dependent on one industry, and that a highly uncertain one, and both the Council and the Chamber of Commerce tried to promote a diversification of local industry. It is the purpose of this section of the chapter to explain why Luton's growth during the interwar period proved so exceptional, even by Southern standards.

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1. F. Grundy and R.M. Titmuss, Report on Luton, p. 19.

2. Population change 1931 - 51: Bedford + 24.6%, Reading + 17.5%, Colchester + 16.9%, Watford + 24.9%, Oxford + 22.5%, Luton + 56.6%. C.A. Moser and Wolf Scott, British Towns. A statistical study of their social and economic differences (1961), pp. 112 - 149.

The hat industry was Luton's staple trade, and even in 1939, more people were employed making hats than building motor vehicles.<sup>1</sup> The hat industry bore some resemblance in its organisation to the textile industries of Halifax and Burnley. Its structure was anarchic: the 103 straw hat manufacturers of 1921 employed on average 90 - 100 workers.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all these firms were privately owned and many were run by one man. The 1920's was a period of sharp fashion changes, and the average Luton manufacturer found great difficulty in keeping up with them. His traditional product, the straw boater, was one of the principal casualties - yet most manufacturers were reluctant to produce anything else. They waited for fashion to swing back their way (for example, there was great excitement in the industry when the Prince of Wales wore a straw boater during a visit to Panama in 1931<sup>3</sup> - but the hat did not catch on, even in Panama). At other times, they proposed "Buy British" campaigns, endeavouring to use nationalism to dissuade consumers from buying cheaper foreign made hats.<sup>4</sup> The manufacturers did not attempt to lead fashion. When one entrepreneur was criticised by another for continuing to make straw hats despite the fact that nobody wanted them, the former retorted, "He says the man who makes straw hats is out of date. It is not the manufacturers who are out of date, but the public."<sup>5</sup> At the same time that Luton manufacturers were losing custom to the more nimble London producers, they were also experiencing considerable difficulties in selling their products overseas. Important markets in Canada and the U.S.A. were lost as a result of their governments' imposing tariffs in the late 1920's and early 1930's.<sup>6</sup>

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1. F.Grundy and R.M.Titmuss, op. cit., p. 101.

2. M.P.Fogarty, op. cit., p. 394.  
"The Hatters' Gazette" Diary, 1921, pp. 21 - 2.

3. Luton News, February 26, 1931, p. 9, col. 6.

4. Ibid., February 19, 1931, p. 8.  
Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, April 1925, pp. 52 - 3.

5. Ibid., April 1925, p. 53.

6. Luton News, February 19, 1931, p. 8; February 26, 1931, p. 9, col. 7.



The consequence of all this was a rising rate of bankruptcies, and increasing uncertainty of employment for the workers in the industry. The turnover of one firm which went bankrupt fell from £181,144 in 1920 to £42,399 in 1931.<sup>1</sup> As in the cotton industry price cutting reduced margins, and "an unhealthy state of competition" followed amongst firms, which found "its ultimate repercussion in the aggravation of the already too high percentage of unemployment."<sup>2</sup>

Thus there were strong superficial resemblances between the hat and textile industries, and the solutions offered to the problems of both were similar. The panacea of industry-wide amalgamations was proposed. In 1923, the "one regret" of the President of Luton Chamber of Commerce "was that the hat trade did not believe in the motto that union was strength. They seemed to be all at sixes and sevens - every man's hand against his neighbour. In co-operation and amalgamation they were certainly behind every other industry in the country."<sup>3</sup> The extent to which progress was made in these matters may be illustrated by an extract from an editorial in the Luton News in 1936<sup>4</sup>: "Where does the future of the Hat Trade lie? He would be a man of infinite wisdom who would dare prophecy. Does it need a drastic reorganisation on federated lines? Does it need a comprehensive and group marketing scheme? In the Hat Trade to-day there is no active unity of purpose. Therein lies its weakness. Given the will and goodwill to weld a conglomeration of hundreds of individual units into one federated whole ... might it not be that the achievement of corporate strength would bring in its train the greater satisfaction of the individual?"

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1. Luton News, September 22, 1932, p. 20, col. 1.

2. Ibid., February 1, 1933, p.8, cols. 1 - 2.

3. Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, February 1923, p. 30.

4. Luton News, January 2, 1936, p. 10, col. 1.

It is true that a new approach was needed to the fashion trade during the interwar period. It was not sufficient to be based only in Luton, to have no contacts with the London fashion industry, and to manage without design departments. All these things cost money and meant a loss of independence, because the resources of individual firms were inadequate to carry them out. Nonetheless, it is questionable how far co-operation and amalgamation would have provided a solution to the problems of the hat trade. A monolithic company might have been just as stubbornly conservative in the products it manufactured, and the individual initiative and flair that enabled some hat firms to do well during this period might have been lost. The fundamental problem of the hat industry was very different to that of cotton. The latter was losing many of its markets, and the only way to survive was to cut costs by rationalising the industry, and by co-operating on research, marketing, etc. Domestic demand for hats - especially women's - remained large during this period, and those firms which were successful in catering for this demand would have gained little from an amalgamation with the incompetent and inefficient majority of firms. What was taking place in the hat industry during the interwar period was a vital readjustment to a changed situation, which in the process considerably reduced the size of the industry; but the surviving companies, in the control of men sensitive to the demands of fashion and able to satisfy them, were able to prosper. Many of these successful companies were tiny, and the average size of firm shrank as the period passed (average employment per firm in 1937 - 38 was about 40<sup>1</sup>), and frequently they reverted to a domestic system of manufacturing, thereby avoiding the costs of maintaining fixed capital. Hats were now mostly individually styled, and could be made by women working at

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1. F.Grundy and R.M.Titmuss, op. cit., p. 101.  
Luton News, December 16, 1937, p. 13, cols. 5 - 6.

home.

This process of change was essential, but it was also harsh to many companies, which failed to survive, depriving Luton of much employment, and rendering a great deal of the rest uncertain. There might have been a serious unemployment problem in Luton in the 1930's had it not been for the growth of the engineering industry, which provided many alternative jobs. Yet, for a period after the First World War, it looked as though two of the main engineering companies would not survive, and several of the others only managed a precarious existence during the slump of the early 1920's. The largest firm, Vauxhall's, ran into deep trouble in 1921, losing £221,759 in that year, and £76,710 in 1922.<sup>1</sup> Although general economic conditions for the car industry were bad at this time, Vauxhall's problems were exacerbated by poor management. Disastrous decisions were made as to the type of car Vauxhall's should produce. Emphasis was put on "comfort and durability [which] even if they cost more, invariably pay in the long run", and on individual styling. The concept of cutting costs by mass manufacture on continuous production lines was not grasped. So many different models were made that prices rose to very high levels (e.g. £1,750 per car in December 1920<sup>2</sup>). Production increased very slowly - only 600 cars were made in 1922, and 1,398 in 1925, with a labour force of 1,850.<sup>3</sup> By 1926, the company was near bankruptcy. The other Luton car company, Commer, faced similar difficulties, and actually passed into the hands of the receiver in 1923.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, unemployment was severe in the early 1920's, and the 15% of Luton males unemployed in May 1921 - half of them in engineering - was not an unusual figure. Up to 5% more were

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1. Economist, May 10, 1924, p. 952.

2. Luton News, October 6, 1921, p. 7, col. 1.

3. Ibid, April 24, 1958, The Vauxhall Story, p. 1.

4. P. Lesley Cook, Effects of Mergers, Six Studies (1958), p. 368.

working short time.<sup>1</sup> The town appears to have suffered from slight emigration during the mid-1920's: the estimated population in 1927 was smaller than it had been in 1924, although birth rates were substantially higher than death rates throughout.<sup>2</sup>

The council recognised that action had to be taken about this situation and it set up a New Industries Committee. This body, however, did not enjoy very much success. There was a great deal of competition amongst local authorities seeking to secure new industries. The Mayor of Luton reported in 1925 that the Committee's efforts to bring new firms to the town had failed, and he added that up to five local authorities were often in competition with one another to attract the same company.<sup>3</sup> The slump persuaded at least one firm which had announced that it would move to Luton to cancel its plans.<sup>4</sup>

The situation was saved by two factors: the basic asset of Luton's geographical position, and the decision by General Motors of America to start car production in Great Britain. General Motors was seeking to take over an English car firm, in preference to building a company up from scratch as Ford had done. Its search coincided with the period when the near-bankrupt Vauxhall company was particularly cheap to buy, and the clinching factor was that the plant was situated so near to London. Vauxhall's was rapidly turned round by General Motors, which provided finance to pay for the remodelling of the factory for organisation on American production lines: between 1930 and 1935, £1.3 million was spent on the development of the plant.<sup>5</sup> The range of cars produced was whittled down, economies of scale were reaped, and prices of the cheaper models dropped from £280 - £497 in 1930 (Cadet), to £195 -

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1. Luton News, May 26, 1921, p. 7, col. 5.

2. Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1924, Tables, Part II. Civil, Table E; Ibid., 1925, Table E; Ibid., 1926, Table E; Ibid., 1927, Table E.

3. Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, December 1925, p. 6.

4. Luton News, July 10, 1924, p. 6, col. 2.

5. Economist, December 7, 1935, p. 1149.

£215 in 1933 (Light Six), and £168 - £198 in 1937 (Vauxhall Ten).<sup>1</sup> Lower prices tapped a wider market, and profits rose fast: per employee net profit was £38 in 1932, but £113 in 1936.<sup>2</sup> By 1933, the debt to General Motors had been paid off.<sup>3</sup>

It would be incorrect to imply that the arrival of General Motors in the town was entirely beneficial - there were two important flaws in the company's policies which were to assume some importance in later years. Firstly, there was a tendency to imitate the harshest aspects of American methods of handling labour. For example, when the factory was closed for remodelling, many workers were laid off and were obliged to draw the dole. One such spell in 1933 lasted three weeks.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the company was restricted in the markets with which it could trade. Only a small proportion of production was exported, and some areas - for example, North America - were entirely closed to it.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, the arrival of General Motors in Luton ensured the town's prosperity. Two major international companies were now based in the town, and what was good for General Motors and Skefco would certainly do for others. The Humber Motor Company which had taken over Commer Cars in 1926 bought Karrier Motors of Huddersfield in 1934 and a year later transferred this company to Luton, amalgamating it with Commer.<sup>6</sup> In 1926, the Swedish refrigerator company, Electrolux, took over a factory in Luton; its first managing director, Dahlerus, had previously managed the Skefco factory in the town.<sup>7</sup> During the 1930's the town was growing so rapidly that even the railway companies felt impelled to improve their facilities. As part of the campaign in the early 1920's to make Luton more attractive to industry, the Council

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1. L.C. Darbyshire, 1857. The Story of Vauxhall. 1946 (undated, c. 1946), The Glossary.

2. Luton News, March 16, 1933, p. 9; April 14, 1938, p. 2; D.T.I., Register of Business Names, The Vauxhall Motor Company, Balance Sheet, 1933, File No. 135767, Vol. 13.

3. Ibid., Balance Sheets, 1932, 1933.

4. Luton News, February 9, 1933, p. 8, col. 3.

5. Ibid., March 30, 1933, p. 11.

6. Luton Municipal Borough, Luton Year Book, The Official Guide and Directory of Organisations, 1962 - 63, p. 109.

7. Luton News, January 28, 1926, p. 9, col. 2.  
Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, February 1926, p. 25.

advocated that a new station be built and that the two railway lines (L.M.S. and L.N.E.R.) which ran through the town be linked together. Both proposals were rejected by the railway companies as too expensive.<sup>1</sup> Yet, by 1938, even the L.M.S. had become convinced that the railway station was inadequate, and they spent £47,600 remodelling it.<sup>2</sup> Luton was thus the only one of these four towns to obtain major improvements from one of the railway companies.

By 1939, Luton's industrial structure had been transformed. Motor vehicle and general engineering combined had become the town's leading industrial sectors, together accounting for 35.5% of employment in the town.<sup>3</sup> Hats and caps provided 24% of employment, and the distributive trades 11½%.<sup>3</sup> No other group employed over 10%. These changes were greatly accelerated by the Second World War. Motor vehicle and general engineering came to dominate the industrial map, employing 59% of the workforce in 1945, whereas the share of hats and caps fell to 5% and that of the distributive trades to 7½%.<sup>3</sup> Thus, despite all the efforts that had been made, Luton retained a comparatively narrow industrial base, especially as many of the engineering companies supplied components to the town's car firms. The desire of the New Industries Committee to avoid over-specialisation had not been fulfilled. A slump in the new basic trade could prove as disastrous as a slump in the old one had seemed likely to be. Some people in the town were aware of the problem, and argued that the place occupied by the motor industry was dangerously large<sup>4</sup>, but very little was done to alter the situation.

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1. Luton News, December 4, 1924, p.9, col. 5.

2. Ibid., January 6, 1938, p. 7.

3. F. Grundy and R.M. Titmuss, op. cit., p. 101.

4. e.g. Luton Year Book, 1962 - 63, p. 91.

## CHAPTER THREE.

INCOME LEVELS AND THE EXTENT OF POVERTY.

This chapter examines how far the pattern of varied regional growth outlined above was reflected in living standards, and to what extent poverty remained in these four towns. Any discussion of living standards, which involves an attempt to calculate the value of real incomes, is fraught with many difficulties. One contemporary commented of his own efforts in this field: "I have been coming to the view ... that as regards social conditions and business practice affecting the common people of this land of ours, no one knows anything about anything that really matters."<sup>1</sup> Conclusions about the extent of poverty have tended to be vague. Estimates of the proportion of the working class who lived below the poverty line vary according to the place studied, the definition of what is the "poverty line", the size of the sample etc. A survey of Bristol revealed that 10.7% of working class families lived in poverty in the late 1930's.<sup>2</sup> In one Northern town, York, according to B. Seebohm Rowntree, the position was much worse. He concluded that 31.1% of the working-class population lived "under the poverty line."<sup>3</sup> A calculation of the national position made by Sir John Boyd Orr, suggested that both the above were too favourable. He argued that 10% of the population was "deficient in every constituent examined" whilst as much as one half was ill fed.<sup>4</sup>

The wide variations between these calculations made by contemporaries indicate the difficulty of making an assessment

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1. J. Hilton, Rich Man, Poor Man (1944), p. 133.
  2. H. Tout, The Standard of Living in Bristol. A Preliminary Report of the Work of the University of Bristol Social Survey (1938), pp. 24 - 5.
  3. B. Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty and Progress. A Second Social Survey of York (1941), p. 456.
  4. John Boyd Orr, Food Health and Income. Report on A Survey of Adequacy of Diet in Relation to Income (1937), pp. 55, 66.

in detail more than thirty years after the end of the period. At the very best the conclusions here can only be tentative. It will be argued that the available evidence indicates that although more people were better off in the South than the North, at the same time, poverty remained widespread in both regions till the end of the period: it is incorrect to pre-date the appearance of a significant regional income gap between North and South.

An examination of poverty must begin with a discussion of the amount of unemployment. This will be followed by an enquiry into wage rates in these four towns, and into the factors which tended to reduce the money differential between them.

It might be expected that as unemployment was the principal social and economic problem of the period, the statistics about it were very carefully and rigorously compiled. Unfortunately, as far as these towns were concerned, this was not the case. No regular returns cover the entire period, and the methods of compilation were occasionally revised, rendering exact year-to-year comparisons very difficult to make. The principal source, the Ministry of Labour Gazette, did not publish returns for Burnley, Halifax, and Ipswich, until 1923, and not at all for Luton. The Local Unemployment Index, which covered the period from 1931 to 1939, was a measure of the proportion of the insured labour force who were unemployed - it did not include those workers who were not insured. Table 3.1 is therefore a crude measure of unemployment.

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TABLE 3.1 : AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT FOR THE YEARS 1923 - 1939.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1923	16.8	5.3	11.3	N.A.
1924	8.9	4.6	8.8	
1925	5.0	7.1	6.0 <sup>2</sup>	
1926	13.5 <sup>2</sup>	9.7	6.2	
1927	6.3	5.6	4.4	
1928	7.4	7.4	4.4	
1929	7.9	7.7	4.6	
1930	25.0	14.0	7.3	
1931	36.7	23.2	15.5	7.9
1932	27.2	16.5	17.5	8.0
1933	24.6	13.7	14.6	5.2
1934	23.6	10.7	11.7	3.7
1935	22.7	7.5	9.8	4.6
1936	20.3	6.4	7.9	5.6
1937	16.5	6.0	6.5	5.7
1938	26.1	11.0	8.1	7.3
1939 <sup>3</sup>	15.4	4.6	8.7	6.9

1. The Ministry of Labour, The Ministry of Labour Gazette, 1923 - 1930, Table: Ministry of Labour Employment Exchanges; later, Numbers on the Registers in the Principal Towns.

Ministry of Labour, Local Unemployment Index, January 1931 - June 1939.

The numbers unemployed between 1923 and 1925 are a percentage of the occupied labour force, including the unemployed, stated in the Census of England and Wales 1921, County Tables, Table 16; and those for the period 1926 - 1930 are a percentage of the occupied labour force, including the unemployed, in the Census of 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 16.

N.A. = not available.

2. Eleven months only.

3. January to April only.

The table makes clear how much worse was the situation in Burnley after 1932. Between 1934 and 1938, the unemployment rate there was at least double that in the other towns. It also shows that the 1930's, as far as unemployment was concerned, was very much the more gloomy of the two decades. In contrast, the employment record of Luton was remarkable during this period. Perhaps the most interesting point to emerge from the table is the similarity between the unemployment records of Halifax and Ipswich, with Ipswich having rather lower figures between 1925 and 1931, but higher ones after that date. The table shows that whereas in the North, unemployment was falling between 1933 and 1937, and was lower in both Halifax and Burnley in 1939 than it had been in 1936, in Ipswich and Luton the reverse was true. The Luton unemployment rate almost doubled between 1934 and 1939. The main cause of this, and one which also partially explains why Ipswich's unemployment rate in the 1930's was so high, was the migration to the Southern towns of the out-of-work, many of whom were unable to find jobs after they had arrived. The migration of farming labourers to Ipswich and other towns in East Anglia was so substantial that it eventually caused a shortage of agricultural workers in the region.<sup>1</sup> In Luton, in 1935, it was found that 50% of the applicants for assistance had come from other districts.<sup>2</sup> These migrants were amongst the poorest inhabitants of both Southern towns. The lack of industrial training of the agricultural workers (unlike the migrants from South Wales, Tyneside, and Clydeside) made it difficult for them to find work. When they finally did so, it was often in the most poorly paid casual labouring jobs, or in the case of women, in domestic service.

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1. Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Year Ended 31st December, 1937; p. 117; 1937 - 38 Cmd. 5752, Vol. XIII, p. 197.
  2. Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Period Ended 31st December 1935 (1936), p. 92; 1935 - 36 Cmd. 5177.

The interwar years were difficult for women who were seeking employment. In both Burnley and Luton, the industries which favoured female employees were in considerable economic difficulties. If unemployment figures are taken for males only, and the trough of the depression (1931 - 33) is compared with the later recovery, from 1934- 37, the following picture emerges:

TABLE 3.2 : AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT OF MALES DURING THE YEARS 1931 - 37<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1931	32.4	24.4	18.4	9.3
1932	25.1	21.7	21.2	10.4
1933	22.7	17.7	17.7	6.8
1934	22.4	13.1	13.9	3.5
1935	21.0	9.4	11.4	3.9
1936	18.5	8.3	8.7	4.3
1937	14.7	6.6	7.3	4.2

The principal difference between Tables 3.1 and 3.2 occurred in Burnley, where on average between 1931 and 1937 the overall unemployment rate was 2.1% higher than the rate for males only. In Halifax and Ipswich, male unemployment rates were generally higher than the overall rates, whereas in Luton, there was a change in the situation in 1934. Before that year, the rate for males was the higher of the two; after 1934, it was lower. The cause of this change lay in the problems of the hat industry, which grew steadily worse during the 1930's.

Unemployment rates, however, do not account for all the interruptions to work: short time working must also be taken into consideration. No regular returns were published about the

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1. Local Unemployment Index, January 1931 - December 1937.

extent of this, but it is possible to obtain an indication of its impact from a variety of sources. Short time working occurred in several forms. Firstly there was seasonal unemployment. It is possible to measure this by comparing the highest and lowest monthly unemployment rates each year. Table 3.3 below compares a period of depression with one of recovery.

TABLE 3.3:<sup>1</sup> SEASONAL UNEMPLOYMENT - THE VARIATION (EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE) BETWEEN THE HIGHEST MONTHLY RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE LOWEST.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1931	16.1	9.8	2.5	6.2
1932	12.7	4.1	4.0	5.9
1933	5.6	11.4	9.0	6.0
1934	3.0	5.5	4.8	7.2
1935	4.4	5.5	4.6	8.4
1936	5.4	4.6	5.4	7.3
1937	5.2	6.2	3.0	8.2

Apart from occasional large swings occurring in the North between 1931 and 1933, seasonal unemployment affected workers in Luton most seriously. It was caused here by the sharp periodic changes in demand in the car and hat industries. Although some of these spells may have been short, the fact that between 1934 and 1937, approximately one person in 12 was affected by them indicates that even in this prosperous town, many people must have been acutely anxious about the threat of unemployment.

The second main form of short time was the working of incomplete days or weeks. This was endemic in all four towns. Table 3.4

1. Local Unemployment Index, January 1931 - December 1937.

compares short time working in the principal industries. The returns refer to industrial groups, not to towns, but each of these industries was sufficiently highly localised to permit the industry and the town to be discussed together.

TABLE 3.4: PERCENTAGE OF THE WORKFORCE ON SHORT TIME.

	<u>1924</u>	<u>1928</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>1931</u> <sup>2</sup>	<u>1935</u>
COTTON (BURNLEY)	20.0 <sup>3</sup>	13.4	11.5	3.5 <sup>4</sup> (weaving only)
TEXTILE MACHINERY ENGINEERING (BURNLEY)	48.8 <sup>5</sup>	37.0	64.6	54.9 <sup>6</sup>
CARPETS (HALIFAX)	8.4 <sup>3</sup>	12.8	30.1	4.2 <sup>4</sup>
WOOL (HALIFAX)	18.9 <sup>7</sup>	31.3	20.6	9.9 <sup>4</sup> (woollen and worsted)
AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING (IPSWICH)	27.3 <sup>5</sup>	7.7	45.0	47.1 <sup>6</sup>
MOTOR VEHICLES (LUTON)	2.8 <sup>5</sup>	3.3	18.6	24.2 <sup>6</sup>

The table shows that the variations in the amount of short time from prosperous to depressed years were very large, but even in good years, some industries, notably textile machinery and agricultural engineering, had upto half the labour force on short time. The reduction in the proportion working short time in cotton in the thirties reflects the shaking out of labour that was taking place in that industry, and the fairly good conditions that prevailed in 1935. When trade was bad, short time working soared (for example, from 3% of the labour force in June 1937 to 29½% in

1. Proportion of workpeople on short time in week ended 27 October 1928. Ministry of Labour Gazette, October 1929, p. 353; November 1929, p. 401.
2. Larger firms only (i.e. those employing ten or more workers). Ibid., January 1933, pp. 9 - 10.
3. Average short time for four weeks in 1924. Ibid., June 1926, p. 197.
4. Ibid., February 1937, p. 48.
5. Ibid., September 1926, p. 325.
6. Ibid., April 1937, pp. 134 - 5.
7. Woollen and worsted industries. Ibid., June 1926, p. 197.

June 1938.<sup>1</sup> The principal Southern industries were also susceptible to sharp fluctuations in the amount of short time working - this falling away in prosperous years like 1928, but soaring in depressions, as the figures for 1931 indicate. The high percentage for car workers in 1935 may have been unusual - the Gazette collected information for the week ending 12 October 1935, and usually, at this time of the year, car production was slack in anticipation of the motor show at Olympia. The table demonstrates how large were the proportions of the working populations of these towns who had had experience of under-employment at one time or another.

In the Northern towns, there was another form of short time working: this involved textile workers operating a reduced number of looms - one or two instead of the customary four. Unfortunately there do not appear to be any regular returns about the extent of this. As the period passed, one of the objects of employers, particularly in the cotton industry, was to reduce the extent of this type of short time working, and to make employees operate as many looms as possible - six, or even eight. Hence, the amount of under-employment of this variety - whether by preference (some women preferred to work only one or two looms) or by necessity, because of lack of orders - was very much less in the middle and late 1930's than it had been in the 1920's.

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1. M.P.Fogarty, op. cit., p. 9.

A third group of the unemployed who must be considered at this point are those who had been unemployed so long that they had had to apply to the Boards of Guardians for relief. The figures that are available for these people are a measure of distress as much as of unemployment, because they include the old, the sick and children, as well as those who were out of work. For much of the period, there was not a great deal of regional difference in these figures - applicants were almost as numerous in the South as in the North. The position began to change in the 1930's, when, as recovery proceeded, in Halifax, Ipswich, and Luton, many of the long term unemployed either got work permanently, or obtained it for a sufficient amount of time to permit them to become insured once again. In Burnley, however, there was a large pool of long term unemployed, many of whom were in the older age groups, who never regained work, so that the position was sharply worse in the Lancashire town towards the period.

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TABLE 3.5: ANNUAL AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION RECEIVING POOR RELIEF.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1924 - 1926	12.3	10.8	10.4	7.2
1927 - 1929	13.3	12.0	10.0	8.0

Unfortunately, the <sup>n</sup>transfer of responsibilities from the Boards of Guardians interrupted the steady flow of official statistics for a time, but there was a resumption in the publication of figures in the mid-1930's, and the returns for the late 1930's show how much worse the position had become in Burnley. The number per thousand of the population there in October 1938 who were receiving allowances from the U.A.B. was 37.7, compared to only 3.0 in Bedfordshire, 4.9 in Ipswich, and 5.3 in Halifax.<sup>2</sup>

The significance of unemployment and short time working was not only economic; it also had evil social consequences and left a bitter political legacy. The fact that unemployment often affected over 10% of the insured labour force in Ipswich, and came frequently near to that total in Luton ( as between November - December 1935: average 9.6%; November - December 1936: average 9.8%; July 1938: 8.9%; January 1939: 9.8%)<sup>3</sup> was a constant reminder to the working populations of both towns that unemployment was always a possibility. It may indeed have been that fear of the consequences of unemployment was much sharper in towns like Luton and Ipswich, where it affected only a proportion of the labour force, than in places like Burnley and Halifax, where a great many - if not a majority - of textile workers had suffered loss of jobs at one time or another. The impact of this fear on the

1. Persons in Receipt of Poor-Law Relief, Table 36; 1924 (144); Vol. XIX, pp. 948 - 979. Persons in Receipt of Poor-Law Relief, Table 25; 1924-25 (164); Vol. XXIII, pp. 482 - 513. Ibid., Table 25; 1926 (134); Vol. XXIII, pp. 932 - 963. Ibid., Table 25; 1927 (78); Vol. XIX, pp. 754 - 785. Ibid., Table 28; 1928 (87); Vol. XIX, pp. 920-951. Ibid., Table 28; 1928 - 29 (114); Vol. XVI, pp. 764 - 795.
2. Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Year Ended 31st December, 1938, pp. 101, 126, 184, 190; 1938 - 39 Cmd. 6021; Vol. Xii, pp. 549, 574, 632, 638.
3. Local Unemployment Index, January 1935 - June 1939.



politics of the Southern towns emerges in the success of the Labour party in the late 1930's, when despite the fact that unemployment was less than half the amount in Ipswich and Luton that it was in Burnley, the Labour party won as high a proportion of the votes as it did in the North.

Yet people who had experienced unemployment do not appear to have been demoralised by it. As George Orwell pointed out, they "settled down"<sup>1</sup> to living on the dole, and even contrived to organise their lives as they had done in times of full employment. For example, many of them would not give up their holidays. Despite prolonged post-war unemployment in Halifax, there was very little fall in the numbers taking their annual week at the seaside.<sup>2</sup> Unemployed Burnley weavers continued to go to Blackpool for their holidays, taking day trips back to Burnley to collect the dole. The Conservative Burnley Express commented, in reporting one such incident, that "it is not, of course, the business of the Employment Exchange officials to enquire how far their 'clients' have travelled, even if they have suspicions."<sup>3</sup> The growth of chainstores, selling mass produced clothing at comparatively low prices, enabled people to keep up appearances, even in Burnley. A writer in the Burnley News, commenting on the Royal Lancashire Show, which was held in the town in 1926, found it "difficult to believe that East Lancashire is passing through probably the worst time it has known since the American War. Everyone seemed to be well dressed."<sup>4</sup> The cinemas provided cheap escapism, and they were well patronised; even in 1930 they "attracted ... business unprecedented in [Burnley's] entertainment history ... there seems to be no lack of money to pay for admission

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1. G.Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 78.

2. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, August 1921, p. 129.

3. Burnley Express, July 12, 1930, p. 16, col. 3.

4. Burnley News, August 7, 1926, p. 9, col. 5.

to the cinemas."<sup>1</sup> Club life remained vital, and in some cases - the sports clubs especially - they thrived on the enforced leisure of the unemployed.

Nor would many of the unemployed take on any job in order to get work, and they advised the younger generation against entering depressed trades. Both the cotton and the straw hat industries experienced increasing difficulty during the 1930's in recruiting school leavers.<sup>2</sup> Burnley women maintained a stubborn resistance to going into domestic service.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, there were some fears<sup>3</sup> that many of the unemployed were losing the capacity to work, that they were growing so accustomed to life on the dole that they deliberately shunned employment. It is fair to say for most of the unemployed in the town most severely hit by this problem that these fears were very largely unfounded. Several thousand people left the town during the 1930's to seek work in other parts of the country. Many who remained did so not because they preferred an idle life on the dole, but because they were either too poor to move, having large families, or because they faced too great a financial loss if they quit the town. Many working class people had bought their homes in more prosperous days, assisted by the thriving building society based in the town. Such people must have been very reluctant to migrate because they knew how little chance there was of selling the house. When the Burnley economy revived at the start of the war, there was no problem of people refusing to go back to work. The unemployed had not been so demoralised or debilitated as to become work shy. Their morale was maintained in part because so many of them had suffered unemployment - it was an experience common to a

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1. Burnley Express, February 8, 1930, p. 18, col. 3.

2. Details in Chapter 6, Education.

3. e.g. Burnley Express, August 25, 1923, p. 10, cols. 4 - 5.

whole generation. The stigma attached to being on the dole disappeared when the numbers applying for relief were so large. One weavers' union official noted as early as 1922 that "cotton operatives who not many years ago would have starved before applying to the Board of Guardians for relief have smothered their scruples and drawn the money."<sup>1</sup> Despite the meannesses occasionally perpetrated on recipients of the dole (for example, some Burnley grocers would not redeem food vouchers given by the Board of Guardians at their full value<sup>2</sup>; and petty officialdom was sometimes tempted to make officious use of its powers via the Means Test), the near-universality of the unemployment experience in Burnley resulted in the "gradual disappearance of the so-called taint attached" to applying to the P.A.C.<sup>3</sup> Of great importance in this change of attitude were the roles played by the elected officials in charge of the Relief Committees who energetically endeavoured to wipe out "that stigma which belongs to poverty and pauperism."<sup>4</sup> Two of the more able councillors produced in these four towns became Chairmen of the Boards of Guardians in Halifax (Mrs. Lightowler) and in Ipswich (Miss Jefferies).<sup>5</sup> Both were on the reforming wing of the Conservative party, and they played major parts in introducing a more humanitarian approach to the problems of the unemployed.

Unemployment at this time, however, did not only affect the working class. Middle class people were hit by it too, though less information is available about them, partly because of the tendency of most of the people involved to want to keep the fact secret. The plight of such people must have been miserable - they did not have the relief of knowing that many of their workfellows and neighbours

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1. Burnley Express, February 15, 1922, p. 8, col. 1.

2. Ibid., October 21, 1922, p. 5, col. 3.

3. Ibid., January 14, 1939, p. 9, col. 3.

4. Burnley News, April 27, 1929, p. 7, col. 4.

5. When the P.A.C.'s took over from the Boards, they became chairmen of the new bodies.

had been or were unemployed - indeed, those that had were probably anxious to conceal the fact. Most made strenuous efforts to preserve appearances as long as possible. Hints of their plight occasionally appear in the newspapers. The experience of one advertiser in the Burnley Express, a man with retail managing experience, who offered 10% of his wages for 12 months to anyone able to find him "any kind of work"<sup>1</sup> was unfortunately typical of many.

The unemployed, however, did not account for all the poor. One of the paradoxes of the period was that workers who were fully employed often earned little more - and sometimes less - than those who were drawing the dole. There is evidence to suggest that there were large numbers of workers who did not receive sufficient wages to keep their families out of poverty in both the North and the South. Assessing exactly how many people were involved in this sort of poverty is a very complex operation, and the difficulties must be explained. Firstly, it is not possible to calculate the wages of every worker, because information about many of them was never published. Records of wages paid in large, or well-unionised industries are often available, though even here, many unions have not preserved them, so that only a partial picture can be built up. Secondly, it is difficult to know what sum constituted the minimum income necessary to sustain healthy life. Seebohm Rowntree calculated that the minimum for a family of man, wife, and three dependant children was 43s. 6d. a week, after paying rent.<sup>2</sup> This assessment ~~assumes~~ assumes very careful and skilful budgeting on the part of the wife, and a strong spirit of sacrifice on the part of the husband in keeping his own demands on the family

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1. Burnley Express, February 19, 1927, p. 8, col. 2.

2. B.S.Rowntree, op. cit., p. 456.

income to a minimum. Many families must have failed completely to keep within the allotments for the various components of expenditure suggested by Rowntree. For the purpose of this thesis, it is proposed to set in addition an upper limit of £3 a week, in order to make allowance for as many types of family as possible, and to take account of the very wide differences in the level of rents from North to South.

It is clear therefore that all people who were receiving the dole fell below this limit, as well as below the Rowntree minimum. Boards of Guardians, in deciding their scales of relief, were instructed by the Ministry of Health that these should not be higher than the wages paid to full time workers. This ruling led to a very tangled situation between 1920 and 1923, when wages fell faster than poor relief scales. This was a period of sharp political controversy, with Labour representatives on the Boards fiercely resisting the proposals to reduce the scales. In Ipswich, members of the Board who voted for reducing the relief at one stage were in danger of physical violence on the part of the mob.<sup>1</sup> In Burnley, there was some sympathy amongst members of the Board who were textile entrepreneurs for the case the unemployed made against reductions, and consequently, the Board was dilatory in reducing its payments; so much so, that it eventually evoked the wrath of the Ministry of Health, which ordered the Board to cut its scales.<sup>2</sup> By 1923, the rates of relief had declined to the level at which they remained for most of the interwar period.

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, May 26, 1922, p. 7, col. 5.

2. Burnley Express, March 11, 1922, p. 16, col.1; April 8, 1922, p. 15; April 22, 1922, p.3, col.3; August 26, 1922, p. 13, col.4; September 2, 1922, p.15.

TABLE 3.6 : MAXIMUM RELIEF PAID BY THE BOARDS OF GUARDIANS.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1920		£2.0.0 <sup>1</sup>		
1921	£2.10s <sup>2</sup>		£1.14s <sup>3</sup>	
1922			£2.0.0. <sup>4</sup>	£1.15s. <sup>6</sup>
1923	£2.5s <sup>5</sup>			

In the 1930's, the payments made by the main bodies giving relief did not vary significantly from town to town, and in the case of those given by the U.A.B., the scales were standard throughout the country. The maximum in January 1935 for a family with three children between the ages of 11 and 13 was £1.17s.6d. By 1939, the rate for the same family had risen to £2.1s.<sup>7</sup> The P.A.C. scales in Burnley, the most depressed of these four towns, were very close to these figures. The maximum relief granted by the Burnley P.A.C. in 1937 was £2.2s.<sup>8</sup> This was 2s. more than the maximum scale had been in 1930.<sup>9</sup> It is thus apparent that all people depending solely on the dole received less even than the minimum necessary to sustain healthy life suggested by Rowntree.

It is proposed at this point to proceed to an examination of wage rates of males in these four towns, with a view to establishing how much wage rates differed from North to South. Most information refers to the middle and late 1930's, and as this

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1. Relief for a family of five. Halifax Courier, December 18, 1920, p. 9, col. 6.
  2. Relief for a family of five. Burnley Express, September 17, 1921, p. 4.
  3. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, August 19, 1921, p. 2, col. 3. Relief for a family of five.
  4. East Anglian Daily Times, May 26, 1922, p. 7, col. 5.
  5. Maximum relief. Burnley Express, August 25, 1923, p. 10, col. 4.
  6. Luton News, November 9, 1922, p. 11, col. 2.
  7. Letter to E.D.Smithies from J.E.Fisk, Information Division, Department of Health and Social Security, 6 December, 1971.
  8. Burnley Express, January 30, 1937, p. 14, col. 5.
  9. Burnley News, June 7, 1930, p. 10, col. 1.

was also the period when the wage gap was likely to be sharpest between the two regions, the comparison will be set between 1935 and 1938.

The principal source of information about wage rates is the Ministry of Labour Gazette, which produced data in two main forms: periodic surveys of wages paid in major industries, and piecemeal changes in rates as these occurred. The first offers a broad outline of the wages situation over the period as a whole: the surveys were based on information provided voluntarily by employers. They give the total wage paid to workers, excluding managers, clerks, and salaried persons, but including foremen. The second provides very partial but, where it is available, very useful insight into wage levels in minor occupations. The Ministry of Labour Gazette has been supplemented by two other sources: information stored by trades unions (unfortunately, this is a meagre source: not much documentation has survived), and casual reports and references in local newspapers.

The discussion will be accompanied by an attempt to quantify how many workers earned above £3 a week, and how many below. The tables can only be regarded as approximations, because of the difficulty of matching the census occupation categories with the groups of wage earners in the Ministry of Labour Gazette, and with the membership of unions. It is particularly difficult to distinguish between skilled and unskilled workers, and the use of the General Labourer and Labourer headings<sup>1</sup> does not by any means include all the unskilled. It is likely therefore that in all four towns the proportions earning less than £3 a week are underestimates. Secondly, because there were no detailed censuses of occupations in the late 1930's,

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1. Code numbers 970, 971 in Census 1921, County Tables, Table 16; Nos. 920, 930 in Table 16, Census 1931, Occupation Tables.

the census of 1931 has been used, so that the tables do not account for many of the changes in occupations that occurred during the decade. This is likely to be most serious with Luton and Burnley, especially in relation to the motor and cotton industries, and with regard to these, it has been possible to obtain figures for the late 1930's, but for most other occupations, there is no alternative to the 1931 statistics.

The principal employer in Burnley was the cotton industry. According to the periodic surveys of the Ministry of Labour Gazette, wages of males in the larger cotton firms (i.e. firms with ten or more workers) were fairly steady during this period: 1924 - 47s; 1928 - 48s.2d; 1931 - 45s.3d; 1935 - 49s.10d.<sup>1</sup> According to Professor Fogarty's figures, wages had risen to 50s.9d. in 1938.<sup>2</sup> Information about other industries in Burnley is very scattered. At the end of the war, wages of miners had been comparatively high, and in 1920, an adult surface worker managed £3.6s.3d a week, whilst the highest paid category, coal hewers, made £4.6s.9d.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter, however, wages were sharply reduced, as depression set in in this industry. Males in the brewing industry in 1925 earned 58s,<sup>4</sup> but during the 1930's, the wage levels in this industry fell sharply, probably as a result of the financial difficulties of the town's principal brewery, and by 1934 were 46s. a week for men.<sup>5</sup> The Burnley engineering industry was also depressed, though there was some recovery in trade in the late 1930's, and by 1938, wages of timeworkers were 49s.<sup>6</sup> Railwaymen also were not well paid; the L.M.S. paid an adult rate of £2.13s. in 1925.<sup>7</sup> But the Burnley

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1. Ministry of Labour Gazette, June 1926, p. 196; October 1929, p. 354; January 1933, p. 9; cotton weaving, males aged 21 and over, February 1937, p. 47.
  2. M.P. Fogarty, op. cit., p. 11.
  3. Burnley Express, April 3, 1920, p. 12, col. 3.
  4. Labour Gazette, January 1925, p. 23.
  5. Ibid., January 1934, p. 31.
  6. Ibid., May 1938, p. 195.
  7. Burnley Education Committee, Juvenile Employment Sub-Committee, Survey of the Principal Local Occupations in which Juveniles are employed, January 1925, p. 19.



economy in the mid-1930's also contained important growth sectors, and these paid comparatively well. Even in 1933, farriers could earn 64s.7½d a week,<sup>1</sup> journeymen in the furniture trade managed 72s in December 1935 for a 48 hour week,<sup>2</sup> and butchery workers with a relatively prosperous retail organisation like the Burnley Co-operative touched 62s. by the age of 23.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 3.7 : WAGES OF MALES IN BURNLEY, 1935 - 38.

<u>CATEGORY A: EARNING £3. A WEEK AND OVER</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
MANAGERIAL <sup>4</sup>	1,771
BOILERMAKERS <sup>5</sup>	200
<u>CATEGORY B: EARNING LESS THAN £3. A WEEK</u>	
COTTON WORKERS <sup>6</sup>	6,604
TEXTILE ENGINEERING <sup>7</sup>	1,080
BREWING <sup>8</sup>	164
<hr/>	
CATEGORY A. AS A % OF THE TOTAL MALE POPULATION 1939 <sup>9</sup>	8.0
" B. " " " " " " " " "	31.7
AVERAGE MALE UNEMPLOYMENT (%) 1935-38 INCLUSIVE <sup>10</sup>	19.1
% OF THE MALE POPULATION EARNING LESS THAN £3. A WEEK:	<u>50.8</u>

1. Labour Gazette, July 1933, p. 266.

2. Ibid., December 1935, p. 485.

3. Ibid., July 1933, p. 267.

4. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 4. Excluding out of work.

5. Burnley Express, November 24, 1934, p. 17. One firm only.

6. Approximate total insured weavers, including unemployed, Burnley Express, December 31, 1938, p. 16, col. 5.

7. Ibid., January 1, 1938, p. 14, col. 6. Excluding unemployed.

8. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 2, Code. No. 381.

Excluding out of work.

9. Male population aged 19½ - 64½. National Register United Kingdom and Isle of Man. Statistics of Population On 29th September, 1939. By Sex, Age and Marital Condition (1944), Table II.

10. Local Unemployment Index, January 1935 - December 1938.

In Halifax, during the period of post-war boom, the average working class income had risen to between £3. and £4. a week, which was approximately double the pre-war level<sup>1</sup>, but thereafter, there was a sharp decline. The average wage in the woollen and worsted industry was 53s.10d in 1924, 49s.4d in 1931, though in the 1930's, there was a rise to 55s.3d in 1935.<sup>2</sup> Wages in the textile <sup>e</sup>dy<sub>L</sub>ing industry appear to have been slightly less than those in woollens and worsteds - in 1937, wages for males aged 21 and over rose from 47s.4d to 48s.7d.<sup>3</sup> The carpet industry was rather better paid, and by 1935 wages had reached 61s.10d, having been 49s.11d in 1924 and 47s.2d in 1931.<sup>2</sup> Statistics for earnings in the engineering industry in Halifax are more difficult to interpret, but it is clear that there were very wide differences between the skilled and the unskilled. Skilled workers in brass manufacture earned 64s.1½d in May 1936, whilst the less skilled only managed 52s.1½d.<sup>4</sup> Textile machinery workers earned about the same (54s.10d).<sup>8</sup> Fitters, turners and machinist timeworkers earned 62s. a week,<sup>5</sup> whilst wire makers fared very much less well with a basic rate of 47s.<sup>6</sup> Labourers did poorly here as elsewhere, earning about 45s.- 49s. a week.<sup>7</sup>

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1. Halifax Chamber of Commerce Journal, June 1921, p. 96.
  2. Labour Gazette, June 1926, p. 196, January 1933, p.9; February 1937, p.47.
  3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, July 23, 1937, p. 10, col. 2.
  4. Labour Gazette, May 1936, p. 185.
  5. *Ibid.*, May 1937, p. 198.
  6. *Ibid.*, September 1937, p. 362.
  7. *Ibid.*, May 1937, p. 198; June 1937, p. 239.
  8. *Ibid.*, April 1937, p. 134.

TABLE 3.8 : WAGES OF MALES IN HALIFAX 1935 - 38.

<u>CATEGORY A : EARNING £3. A WEEK AND OVER</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
MANAGERIAL <sup>1</sup>	2,506
CARPETS <sup>2</sup>	2,056
BRASS MOULDERS <sup>3</sup>	104
METAL MACHINISTS <sup>3</sup>	1,030
<u>CATEGORY B : EARNING LESS THAN £3. A WEEK</u>	
WOOLLENS AND WORSTEDS; TEXTILE DYEING; COTTON; MISCELLANEOUS TEXTILE PRODUCTS	5,644 <sup>4</sup>
TEXTILE MACHINERY AND ACCESSORIES ENGINEERING <sup>5</sup>	378
WIRE MANUFACTURE <sup>6</sup>	586
LABOURERS <sup>7</sup>	1,442
<hr/>	
CATEGORY A AS A % OF THE TOTAL OCCUPIED MALE POPULATION <sup>8</sup>	27.9
" B " " " " " " " " "	33.1
% MALE UNEMPLOYMENT AVERAGE 1935 - 38 INCLUSIVE <sup>9</sup>	8.6
% OF MALE POPULATION EARNING LESS THAN £3. A WEEK	<u>41.7</u>

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1. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 4. Excluding out of work.
  2. G.C.Hamilton to E.D.Smithies, 29 October 1970.
  3. Census 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 16. Including out of work. These industries were in prosperity in the mid-thirties.
  4. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 4. Operatives only, excluding unemployed.
  5. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 2. Excluding unemployed.
  6. Ibid., Table 2. Excluding unemployed.
  7. Ibid., Occupation Tables, Table 16. Including unemployed.
  8. Ibid., Table 16. Excluding unemployed.
  9. Local Unemployment Index, January 1935 - December 1938.

In Ipswich, the high wages that had been obtained just after the war were sharply reduced in the early 1920's. A 13 week lockout in the engineering industry in 1922 forced a reduction in the average wage from £3.14s to £2.12s.<sup>1</sup> The principal branch of the engineering industry - agricultural engineering - was depressed for most of the 1920's. Wages here were 46s.7d in 1924, only 40s.7d in 1931, though they rose considerably in the 1930's, reaching 55s.11d in 1935.<sup>2</sup> Wages in the docks were reduced in 1922 from 12s. to 10s. a day,<sup>3</sup> and they did not rise very much thereafter, remaining between 50s. and £3. a week as late as 1938.<sup>4</sup> Amongst the poorest paid groups in Ipswich and the surrounding districts were the agricultural labourers. Wages in this industry in the 1920's for a 50 hour week were 35s.2d.<sup>5</sup> and even though many labourers may not have had to pay rent, wages nonetheless were amongst the lowest in any of these four towns. There was some increase over the period, to 30s. minimum in 1934,<sup>6</sup> and by September 1937<sup>7</sup> they had reached a top rate of 38s.6d, but this was still no better than the dole. By the late 1930's, one estimate put to Ipswich Committee against Malnutrition of the average wage in the town was £2.10s a week,<sup>8</sup> but there was a wide range of wages on either side of this figure. Above were the skilled sections of engineering: patternmakers (66s.)<sup>9</sup>, fitters (61s.)<sup>10</sup>, experienced (i.e. of two years length) plate and machine moulders (56s.)<sup>11</sup>,

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1. R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 79 - 80.

2. Labour Gazette, September 1926, p. 324; January 1933, p. 9; April 1937, p. 133.

3. R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 100 - 102.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, January 24, 1938, p. 4, col. 2.

5. Labour Gazette, February 1925, p. 56.

6. Ibid., September 1934, p. 337.

7. Ibid., September 1937, p. 358.

8. East Anglian Daily Times, January 24, 1938, p. 4.

9. Labour Gazette, May 1937, p. 198.

10. Ibid., June 1937, p. 239.

11. Ibid., June 1938, p. 238.

and boilermakers (57s. - 70s.)<sup>1</sup>. Shop assistants earned £3.4s.,<sup>2</sup> electricians £3.14s.,<sup>2</sup> and bus drivers 60s.5d. - 62s.6d.<sup>2</sup> But many groups were around or below the average: adult male attendants in cinemas (40s. - 45s. in 1938<sup>3</sup>); local government manual workers (46s.8d in 1931,<sup>4</sup> thereafter rising slightly to £2.12s.8d in 1938)<sup>2</sup>. The average wage in the building industry of labourers was £2.10s.6d in 1938,<sup>2</sup> for labourers in the gas works £2.11s.,<sup>2</sup> for conductors on the buses £2.14s - £2.16s.,<sup>2</sup> whilst both the Ministry of Labour Gazette,<sup>5</sup> and Ipswich trade union officials, agreed that wages for labourers were about 50s. a week on average.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Labour Gazette, September 1938, p. 367.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, January 24, 1938, p. 4, col. 2.

3. Labour Gazette, September 1938, p. 368.

4. Ibid., June 1931, p. 239.

5. Labour Gazette, June 1938, p. 238; September 1938, p. 367.

TABLE 3.9 : WAGES OF MALES IN IPSWICH 1935 - 38.

<u>CATEGORY A : NUMBER EARNING £3. A WEEK AND OVER.</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
MANAGERIAL <sup>1</sup>	1,816
ELECTRICIANS <sup>2</sup>	277
TRAM DRIVERS <sup>3</sup>	83
<u>CATEGORY B : NUMBER EARNING UNDER £3. A WEEK.<sup>4</sup></u>	
AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING <sup>5</sup>	3,035
DOCK WORKERS <sup>6</sup>	1,500
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS <sup>7</sup>	314
BUILDING <sup>8</sup>	1,778
BUS CONDUCTORS <sup>9</sup>	98
<hr/>	
CATEGORY A AS A % OF THE TOTAL OCCUPIED MALE POPULATION <sup>10</sup>	10.3
" B " " " " " " " " "	32.0
% MALE UNEMPLOYMENT AVERAGE 1935 - 38 INCLUSIVE <sup>11</sup>	<u>9.1</u>
% OF THE MALE POPULATION EARNING UNDER £3. A WEEK	<u>41.1</u>

1. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 4. Excluding out of work.
2. Ibid., Occupation Tables, Table 16. Including unemployed.
3. Ibid., Table 16. Including unemployed.
4. Figures for labourers and general labourers have been excluded from the table because many in the engineering, building and docking categories were labourers.
5. Census 1921, Industry Tables, Table 4. Including out of work. The 1921 figures have been used in preference to those for 1931 because the latter excluded the unemployed. 1931 was a year of very heavy unemployment in this industry, and the Census figures do not take account of all those who in normal times could expect to be employed in this industry.
6. East Anglian Daily Times, March 29, 1930, Supplement.
7. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 4. Operatives only, excluding the out of work.
8. Ibid., Table 4. Operatives only, excluding the out of work.
9. Census 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 16. Including unemployed.
10. Ibid. Excluding unemployed.
11. Local Unemployment Index, January 1935 - December 1938.

The largest employer during this period in Luton was the hat industry. Wages statistics for this industry are thinner than for any other of the major employers in these towns. The Ministry of Labour Gazette did not enquire into wages in the hat industry until 1931, and because hat making was very dispersed geographically and there were great variations in the prosperity (or lack of it) of its various sections, it is not safe to apply the Gazette's figures to Luton. Nor is it possible to use trades union materials because unions were not developed in the hat industry till the very end of the period. The main source is consequently occasional reports and advertisements for workers appearing in the Luton News and these indicate a low level of wages in this industry (for women, as low as £2, and often, little higher for men).<sup>1</sup> Also badly paid were agricultural workers, although they were slightly better off than their equivalents in East Anglia. Farm labourers in Bedfordshire earned 29s. a week in 1925<sup>2</sup>; increasing to a minimum rate in 1937 of 34s.,<sup>3</sup> but this was still well below the Rowntree minimum. By contrast, workers in the motor industry were extremely well paid. Even in 1931, the average wage was 61s.8d, almost as high as it had been in 1928 (62s.1d) and in 1924 (63s.)<sup>4</sup>. The 1930's were to see substantial wage increases, to 78s.5d. in 1935<sup>5</sup> and 83s.3d in 1938.<sup>6</sup> But other workers - the unskilled and semi-skilled - did not fare nearly as well, and according to F.Grundy and R.M.Titmuss, these comprised 34% of the occupied males in Luton as late as 1945.<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1930's, many in these categories received low wages. According to one union official, some engineers were taking home as little as 28s.6d,<sup>8</sup> and even the district rate of his union was only 10s. a week above this.<sup>8</sup>

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1. E.g. Luton News, January 20, 1938, p. 9; February 4, 1937, p. 6, col. 2.
  2. Labour Gazette, February 1925, p. 55.
  3. *Ibid.*, November 1937, p. 447.
  4. *Ibid.*, September 1926, p. 324; all workers, male and female, November 1929, p. 401; January 1933, p. 9.
  5. *Ibid.*, April 1937, p. 134.
  6. M.P.Fogarty, op. cit., p. 11.
  7. F.Grundy and R.M.Titmuss, op. cit., p. 45.
  8. Luton News, September 20, 1934, p. 8, col.2.

During the next three years, wages rose and had reached 48s.6d in 1937.<sup>1</sup> Some postmen, according to a letter written to the Luton News, earned only £2.6s a week.<sup>2</sup> Unskilled local authority manual workers did not earn very much more (51s. in 1935 for a 48 hour week), though if they were skilled they could earn upto 68s.<sup>3</sup> However, even some skilled occupations in Luton were poorly paid. Salesmen earned a minimum wage of £2.15s in 1938<sup>4</sup>, whilst in 1936, according to a Labour councillor, a labourer for a 47 hour week earned £2.3s.6d and even a skilled fitter managed only £2.16s.9¼d for a full week. To prove his point, the councillor handed round wage envelopes to council members.<sup>5</sup> This would suggest that the high wages being paid in the motor industry were very much exceptional in Luton at this time.

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1. Labour Gazette, November 1937, p. 448.
  2. Luton News, January 27, 1938, p. 9, col. 2.
  3. Labour Gazette, March 1935, p. 116.
  4. Luton News, February 3, 1938, p. 3, col. 5.
  5. Ibid., March 19, 1936, p. 13, col. 7.



TABLE 3.10 : WAGES OF MALES IN LUTON 1935 - 38.

<u>CATEGORY A : EARNING £3. A WEEK AND OVER</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
MANAGERIAL <sup>1</sup>	2,039
CAR WORKERS <sup>2</sup>	7,100
<u>CATEGORY B : EARNING £3 A WEEK AND UNDER</u>	
HAT WORKERS <sup>3</sup>	3,943
GENERAL LABOURERS <sup>4</sup>	1,134
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CATEGORY A AS A % OF THE 1939 MALE POPULATION <sup>5</sup>	31.0
" B " " " " " OCCUPIED MALES <sup>7</sup>	26.7
AVERAGE MALE UNEMPLOYMENT 1935-8 INCLUSIVE (%) <sup>6</sup>	<u>4.5</u>
% OF MALE POPULATION EARNING LESS THAN £3 A WEEK	<u>31.2</u>

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1. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 4. Excluding out of work.
  2. Economist, December 7, 1935, p. 1149.
  3. Census 1931, Industry Tables, Table 2. Excluding unemployed.
  4. Census 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 16. Including unemployed.
  5. Males aged 19 $\frac{3}{4}$  - 64 $\frac{3}{4}$ . National Register 1939, Table 2.
  6. Local Unemployment Index, January 1935 - December 1938.
  7. Census 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 16. Excluding unemployed.

The proportions in Category B thus vary from 50.8% in Burnley to 41.7 in Halifax, 41.1 in Ipswich, and 31.2 in Luton. These figures are minima - everywhere there is the absence of wage figures for small industries, un-unionised plants, casual jobs, "blind-alley" occupations, which were numerous during this period. The Luton figure is a serious underestimate in view of the paucity of information about many of the occupations in the town. If Titmuss and Grundy's figure of 34% for the proportion of semi-skilled and unskilled (whose wages, according to the information that is available<sup>1</sup>, were approximately £1.8s.6d - £2.11s a week between 1934 and 1937) is added to the hatmakers (as a proportion of the 1939 male population)<sup>2</sup>, it produces a total for the proportion earning less than £3. a week of 47.1%, higher than the figures for Halifax and Ipswich, though lower than those for Burnley.

The percentages in Category A are all under-estimates: it is not possible to present a complete picture because of the shortage of information. Of the major categories of workers, only those in the motor industry were in the higher earnings group.

If instead of £3. a week, Rowntree's minimum of 43s.6d is taken, workers in the principal industries in these towns all earned above it, with the exception of the hat makers. With cotton at 49s.10d, wool at 55s.3d, agricultural engineering and labouring in Ipswich at 55s.11d and £2.10s respectively, and hats at £2., there was surprisingly little difference between earnings in the main industries in these towns. It is however clear that because unemployment was very much larger in Burnley than the other towns, the very poor - those receiving under £2. a week, were more numerous there.

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1. Luton News, September 20, <sup>1934</sup>p. 8, col. 2; Ministry of Labour Gazette, November 1937, p. 448; March 1935, p. 116.

2. Males aged between 19 $\frac{3}{4}$  - 64 $\frac{3}{4}$ . National Register 1939, Table II.

However, the purchasing power of both Northern communities was boosted to a much greater extent than was the case in Ipswich, though not in Luton, by the employment of women. Although the wages paid to women in the principal industries did not differ much from town to town during this period, the numbers of females in employment did.

The principal employer in Burnley was the cotton industry. Women suffered much more than men from short time working, whilst in addition a large proportion preferred to work only part of the time. Consequently, the average wage of females was substantially less than that of the men. Average wages in the cotton industry in 1924 were 28s.3d; in 1928: 29s.1d; only 27s.3d in 1931, but rising slightly thereafter to 30s.8d in 1935.<sup>1</sup> In a few cases women could earn very much higher wages than this. Where the manufacturer had gone over to six or eight looms per weaver, and was making high quality or fancy goods, women earned as much as men. For example, in Spencer's Burnley cotton mills, where the labour force was 80% female, the average wage rose from £2.6s.9d in 1936 to £2.8s.9d in 1938.<sup>2</sup> But such mills were exceptional, and low wages for women seem to have prevailed in most other industries in Burnley. The brewers paid 39s. in 1925<sup>3</sup>, whilst girls employed in dress making (which was to become a fast growing industry in the 1930's) in the same year earned 11s. at 14, rising to 35s.6d at the age of 21.<sup>4</sup> Burnley Co-operative paid its laundryworkers 35s.- 39s.a week in 1935.<sup>5</sup>

Wage levels in Halifax were similar. Women's wages in the woollen and worsted industry averaged 30s.7d in 1924, 30s.3d in 1928, but declined in 1931 to 27s.7d. By 1935, wages were little

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1. Labour Gazette, June 1926, p. 196; October 1929, p. 354; January 1933, p. 9; Women aged 18 and over in cotton weaving, February 1937, p. 47.
  2. Burnley Express, January 7, 1939, p. 11, col. 6.
  3. Labour Gazette, January 1925, p. 23.
  4. Burnley Education Committee, Juvenile Occupations, January 1925, p. 30.
  5. Labour Gazette, August 1935, p. 314.

higher than they had been in the 1920's, averaging 3ls.3d for women over the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> In this industry too the range between women was considerable, depending on the type of mill they were employed in, and the number of hours they worked. Halifax Central Library contains the wage books of a worsted spinner, Stott and Ingham, of Battinson Lane Mills, for the interwar period. These show that the range of payments in 1924 ran from 14s. a week, to £2.13s.7d. The best paid women were able to earn as much as men, but a great many of them took home less than a pound a week, even in 1935.<sup>2</sup> Textile dyeing was better paid (£1.18s.1ld in August 1937<sup>3</sup>) and so, by 1935, was the carpet industry (36s.9d) where a substantial rise in wages had taken place compared with earlier in the period (1924: 26s; 1931: 27s.3d)<sup>4</sup>.

In Ipswich, there was no large single factory employer of women. The most important type of work available for females was domestic service, which rarely, according to the advertisements in the local newspapers, paid more than £1.10s a week, and often considerably less. The small number of women employed in agricultural engineering were paid at even lower rates than females in cotton and wool. In 1924, their wages averaged 24s.4d, only 20s. in 1931, and 25s.1ld for women aged over 18 in 1935.<sup>5</sup> Even some of the new occupations provided by developments such as the cinemas did not provide wages much higher than this: in 1938, usherettes earned from 17s.6d to 23s., compared to the wage of 19s.6d to 32s.6d for the cashiers.<sup>6</sup>

The principal occupation of women in Luton in the mid-thirties was hat making. Earnings of women in this industry could rise as high as £2. a week, depending on the type of hat made, but the wages of many female workers were upto 12s. less than this.<sup>7</sup> The

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1. Labour Gazette, June 1926, p. 196; October 1929, p. 354; January 1933, p. 9; February 1937, p. 47.
  2. Halifax Central Library, Stott and Ingham (Battinson Lane Mills), Wage Books, 1924 - 1935.
  3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, July 23, 1937, p. 10, col.2.
  4. Labour Gazette, June 1926, p. 196; January 1933, p. 9; February 1937, p. 47.
  5. *Ibid.*, September 1926, p. 324; January 1933, p. 9; April 1937, p. 133.
  6. *Ibid.*, September 1938, p. 368.
  7. Luton News, January 20, 1938, p.9, col. 5; Labour Gazette, February 1937, p. 47.

high wages earned by men in the motor industry were not shared by females: wages averaged 28s.1d in 1924, 29s.1d in 1931, rising to 35s.3d for women aged 18 and over in 1935.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it may be seen that wages of women in these four towns did not vary a great deal. To summarise:

TABLE 3.11: WAGES OF WOMEN 1935 - MAIN OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS.

BURNLEY: COTTON	£1.10s.8d.
HALIFAX: WOOL	£1.11s.3d.
IPSWICH: DOMESTIC SERVICE	£1.10s (at most)
LUTON: HATS	£1.12s - £2.

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The proportion of women in employment, however, did, and the injection of finance into the purchasing power of these communities that they provided was very much less in Ipswich than it was in the other towns.

Although official statistics are not available for female employment after 1931, it is possible to make a rough calculation of the number of men and women in work by comparing the number on the register published in the Ministry of Labour Gazette<sup>2</sup> with the percentages for the unemployed listed in the Local Unemployment Index.<sup>3</sup> This method, however, does not provide figures for Luton because that town was not included in the Ministry of Labour Gazette tables. However, if it be assumed that the insured in 1939 divided in the same proportion between male and female as the occupied had in 1931, then it is possible to obtain an estimate of female employment in that year. In 1931, the female proportion of the occupied population,<sup>4</sup> including the unemployed, was 35%.

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1. Labour Gazette, September 1926, p. 324; January 1933, p. 9; April 1937, p. 134.

2. Ministry of Labour Gazette, Table: Numbers on the Registers in the Principal Towns.

3. Local Unemployment Index, 1939.

4. Census 1931, Occupation Tables, Table 16.

TABLE 3.12: NUMBER OF WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT (EXCLUDING THE OUT OF WORK)

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
JANUARY 1939	11,504	13,680	6,139	14,439
AS A % OF WOMEN <sup>1</sup> AGED 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ - 64 $\frac{3}{4}$ :	34	35	17	40

The table shows that in January 1939 more than one women in three in Burnley, Halifax and Luton was in work, compared to one in six in Ipswich. The injection of purchasing power provided by women was thus half in Ipswich what it was elsewhere.

How far did the additional purchasing power in Luton introduce a regional income gap between North and South? It would be very useful at this point to know how many of the working women in these towns were married, and how many single, but no breakdowns on this point were provided anywhere. Such evidence as is available suggests that in Britain as a whole during this period women tended to lose their jobs on becoming married,<sup>2</sup> so that the contributions wives made to family incomes may not have been large in Luton, Halifax or Burnley.

There are two reasons for believing that a significant gap in real incomes between the majority of families in Luton, and the other three towns had not emerged in the mid-thirties. Firstly, rents were very much higher in Luton than elsewhere, and must have absorbed a substantial proportion of any additional income that might have been available as a result of wives' earnings; and secondly, the distribution of consumer durables such as cars, radios, and telephones was not greater in the South than in the North.

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1. National Register 1939, Table II.

2. E.g. N.Branson and M.Heinemann, Britain in the Nineteen Thirties (Panther Edn., 1973), p. 32. They add that less than one married woman in eight had a job in 1931.

Complete scales of rents are not available because regular records of private rents were not kept, but it is possible to get a fairly accurate idea of the range of rents at this time from the newspapers. In the North, council house rents tended to be higher than private rents; in the South, the converse was true.

TABLE 3.13: RANGE OF RENTS - 1924 COMPARED TO 1937.

	<u>1924</u>	<u>1937</u>
BURNLEY <sup>1</sup>	2s. - 11s.0d.	2s.11d - 9s.6d.
HALIFAX <sup>2</sup>	2s.6d - 9s.0d.	2s.6d. - 8s.
IPSWICH <sup>3</sup>	5s. - £1.3s.0d.	5s. - £1.3s.0d.
LUTON <sup>4</sup>	11s.	14s. - £1.0.0.

The impact of high rents was particularly severe in Luton, where a sharp housing shortage, and the failure of the council to build enough houses was causing private rents to rise steeply. The impact, in the late 1930's, of rents between 14s. and £1 a week was to reduce the real incomes of many Luton workers with earnings under £3. a week to the level of payments from the U.A.B. The importance of the rented sector in Luton is demonstrated by the fact that as late as 1945 81% of the houses in the town were rented.<sup>5</sup> The plight of people living in such accommodation emerged in many letters written to the Luton News complaining about "grabby landlords"<sup>6</sup> "Give me the North every time," this writer added, "I'm disgusted with the housing in the South." Another letter is especially interesting because the writer had moved to Luton from Wigan, and claimed that the lowest rented house he was able to find in Luton

1. Letter from G.Fitzpatrick, Director of Housing, Housing Department, County Borough of Burnley, 20 October 1971  
Burnley Express, February 9, 1929, p. 9, col. 2.
2. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 1, 1931, p.5, col.4, and advertisements in that newspaper.  
Letter from W.E.Churms, Deputy Housing Manager, Housing Department, County Borough of Halifax, 13 October 1971.
3. Letter from L.R.Knights, the Housing Manager, Borough Treasurer's Department, County Borough of Ipswich, 11 October 1971.
4. Letter from F.C.Hamel, Housing Manager, County Borough of Luton, 8 October 1971.  
Luton News, March 19, 1936, p. 13, col. 7.
5. F.Grundy and R.M.Titmuss, op. cit., p. 114.
6. Luton News, February 10, 1938, p. 9, col. 4.

was at 14s.6d a week, compared to his Wigan rent of 4s.6d a week. Luton coal prices were 2s.4d a bag compared to 1s.8d in Wigan. He estimated that the cost of living in Wigan was 8s. in the pound less than in Luton, and he could live (he had returned North) more cheaply on his Wigan dole money of £1.11s.6d than he could on his Luton wage of £1.19s.6d.<sup>1</sup> Such letters must be approached with caution because the writers were disillusioned with the situation they found in Luton,<sup>2</sup> but that the housing problem was very difficult also for the Luton born appears from letters written to the newspaper, some of which blamed Northerners or Scotsmen for the rise in rents that was taking place in the town: for example, "if some of these people would go back to the North, locals might have a hope of getting a house at a reasonable rent."<sup>3</sup>

The most solid evidence in favour of greater Southern prosperity was the large number of private enterprise houses built there:<sup>4</sup>

BURNLEY 1279; HALIFAX 3046; IPSWICH 6884; LUTON 10,284

It is thus apparent that private enterprise companies were far more active in house building in the South - eight times as many were built in Luton, for example, as in Burnley. However, the pressures of demand for houses were very different from one region to the other. Burnley lost 18,000 people during these years, whereas Ipswich gained 20,000 and Luton 40,000. In view of the number of houses that were becoming vacant in the North, it is perhaps surprising that private enterprise builders were active at all there

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1. Luton News, October 15, 1936, p. 11, col. 4.

2. E.g. Ibid., February 24, 1938, p. 9, cols. 2-3.

3. Ibid., March 17, 1938, p. 9, col. 3.

4. Sources: footnotes p. 187.



during this period.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, it is clear that only a minority of Lutonians were sufficiently well off to be able to afford to buy a house when it is recalled that in 1945, over 80% of Luton's houses were rented. Although the weekly re-payment on a mortgage was not a great deal more than the rent of a house, the amount of the deposit (£50 in 1937 for a new house)<sup>2</sup> put house purchase beyond the scope of the great majority of the population. As rents were so high, the majority of the people in the town had very little income to spare for other items. For example, the second largest purchase after buying a house that the average family makes is the acquisition of a car. In the mid-1930's, the distribution of car licenses showed no marked regional divergence: it was highest in Halifax (one license for every 27 people), and Ipswich (1:29.4), whilst there was comparatively little difference between Burnley (1:38.3), and Luton (1:38).<sup>3</sup> Thus it is apparent that despite the presence of two car firms in Luton, the people as a whole were as little - or as well - able to afford cars as those of Burnley. Southerners owned many fewer radios than Northerners: there were 34,108 licenses in Burnley (1:2.5 people) and 38,107 in Halifax (1:2.5), whereas there were 28,665 in Ipswich (1:3.5) and only 24,676 in Luton (1:4.1).<sup>3</sup> Radios were amongst the cheaper of the new consumer durables that were becoming generally available in the 1930's, and it is surprising that Luton should have fared so badly compared with the other towns. It is highly unlikely that Luton people rejected the radio out of choice; it is more probable that their existing commitments (mortgages, high rents) caused them not to be able to afford them.

The information relating to telephones is more difficult to interpret. Many of these were installed in factories and offices,

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1. It would be useful at this point to know how many mortgages, for both old and new houses, were being arranged at this time, but such information was not assembled on a town basis during this period.
  2. Luton News, November 4, 1937, p. 18.
  3. C.Chisholm (Ed.), Marketing Survey of the United Kingdom and Census of Purchasing Power Distribution (2nd. Edn., 1937), pp.126-9, 170-71, 181-83, 199-200. The figures for car licenses were taken by Chisholm from the Ministry of Transport returns for June 1937; those for wireless licenses from the Postmaster General's returns for May 1937; and those for telephones from Post office returns of June 1937. Ibid., p. 19.  
Population: National Register 1939, Table 1.

proportionately fewer in private homes. But the league table of telephones does not follow the urban growth league. Halifax had the highest ratio of telephones to population (1:28), followed by Luton (1:34), Burnley (1:41), and Ipswich (1:43)<sup>1</sup>. In view of its large commercial and financial sector, together with the substantial expansion of industry in the town during this period, the low ratio in Ipswich is surprising, and indicates how limited was the proportion of the population which was able to afford this service.

Thus, poverty, whether caused by unemployment or by low earnings and high rents, was widespread in these four towns. There are many indications in the press of the period of the hardships people suffered. For example, in Burnley in 1936 the P.A.C. issued 1,205 pairs of clogs to people who could not afford shoes.<sup>2</sup> In the previous five years, 17,239 items of clothing had been distributed to 4,393 people ("needy cases") by a voluntary association.<sup>3</sup> In Halifax, during the depression of 1921, it was estimated that £2,000 was needed to provide clogs for the poor.<sup>4</sup> In the same town at the very end of the period, the leader of the Labour group on the council remarked on "the huge number of people who daily walked to business in Halifax, because they were not able to pay 8d. or 10d. a day in bus fares."<sup>5</sup> The situation of the old, the ill and the single unemployed was perhaps the worst of all. A series of budgets of women aged between 57 and 67, which were read out to Halifax Board of Guardians, illustrate the distressing plight of the very poor during this period. One woman, with a weekly income from the Guardians of 12s. spent 6s.4d of it on rent, coal, gas and firewood, and 4s.5½d on food (i.e. milk 1s.5½d., margarine 6½d.,

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1. C.Chisholm, op. cit., pp. 128-29, 170-71, 181-83, 199-200.

2. Burnley Express, January 13, 1937, p. 7, col. 4.

3. Ibid., February 17, 1937, p. 8, col. 1.

4. Halifax Courier and Guardian, December 3, 1921, p. 7, col. 1.

5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 6, 1939, p. 7, col. 3.

sugar 7d., coffee 8d., onions 6d., potatoes 4d., and bacon 4½d.) Another woman "was ill" so her budget included an item of 4d. for lint.<sup>1</sup> In Ipswich, the poverty existing in the town in the late 1930's, and one of its most alarming by-products, malnutrition, caused a group of councillors, doctors and other interested people to set up 'The Committee against Malnutrition', which rapidly assembled a substantial amount of information about poverty in the town.<sup>2</sup> Its representatives called on 35 families, some of them random visits, in others where the family had applied for assistance. Only six heads of families had total incomes of over £2.13s a week, although 22 of them were in employment. Seven had incomes under £2. a week.<sup>3</sup> The sample was too small for any town-wide conclusions to be drawn, but it did add further evidence to support the view that a major cause of poverty was the inadequate wages paid in many occupations. A separate survey carried out about the same time by Dr. Pringle, a former Medical Officer of Health for the town, revealed that of 100 families, 68 had incomes of £2.15s or less, 59 were in his opinion deficient in the amount of money they had to spend on food, but in only 38 cases was the father of the family out of work. Pringle argued that in every case the family milk supply was deficient, and he concluded that housewives found milk (and fruit and eggs) too expensive to buy.<sup>4</sup> And this was despite the fact that Ipswich was at the heart of an agricultural area.

In view of the greater economic growth in the South, why did so much poverty remain in these towns? To begin with, an earnings gap in favour of the South was slow in appearing because Southern earnings had, before 1921-22 been considerably lower than Northern

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1. Halifax Courier, December 18, 1920, p. 9, col. 6.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, December 30, 1937, p. 2, col. 3; November 4, 1938, p. 12. The paper also carried reports on malnutrition in Ipswich on January 4, 6, 10, 11, 19, 24, 25, 1938.

3. *Ibid.*, December 30, 1937, p. 2, col. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, November 4, 1938, p. 12.

ones. Before that time, Northern miners, textile and engineering workers had been among the best paid, and one of their greatest grievances after 1921 was that they were falling behind many other occupations in the level of their earnings.<sup>1</sup> In the South, however, there had been much unemployment and under-employment before 1914<sup>2</sup> and it took time before wage levels in many Southern industries caught up with those in the North.

Nor did the Southern workers, once the industries in which they worked had begun to expand, see this reflected in rising earnings because they were inhibited from making substantial wage demands by the persistent threat of unemployment and the weakness of the Trades Unions.

Much of the work provided by the new industries was semi-skilled or unskilled, and the workers were easily replaced. In both towns, not only were there persistent pools of unemployment, but there were also large numbers of migrants looking for jobs. People were thus reluctant to strike for higher wages when there were always plenty of replacements outside the factory gates. The recent memory of the high unemployment between 1929 and 1933 made many workers nervous of becoming over-ambitious on the wages front, and the bouts of high seasonal unemployment that persisted upto the end of the period operated as a constant warning of what might happen if the wrath of the employer was incurred. In Ipswich, between December 1933 and April 1934, the male unemployment rate averaged 16%; between September 1935 and March 1936, it averaged 10.9%;<sup>3</sup> and between September 1938 and February 1939, the average was again 10.9%.<sup>3</sup> In Luton the pattern of sharp seasonal unemployment was similar, and unemployment on occasion assumed menacing proportions

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1. Burnley News, September 15, 1928, p. 10.

2. J.Dyer, F.Stygall and John Dony, The Story of Luton (1966), p. 172.

3. Local Unemployment Index, November 1932 - February 1939.

amongst women:<sup>1</sup>

NOVEMBER - MARCH 1932-33	AVERAGE MALE UNEMPLOYMENT:	11.4%
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1936	" FEMALE "	19.7%
" " 1937	" " "	22.3%
JUNE 1938 - JANUARY 1939	" " "	14.6%

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Finally the trades unions were very much weaker in the South than they were in the North, and they were weakest of all in Luton, the town where it might have been expected that wages would have risen fastest. Unionisation in the hat industry had failed in the nineteenth century because firms were small and the relationship between employers and employees was very close - often the two sides were related to one another.<sup>4</sup> The first 40 years of the twentieth century saw hardly greater success on the part of the unions. The Secretary of the Luton Felt Hatters and Trimmers Union worked for three years (from 1934 to 1937) to start a branch of the union in Luton, but the organisation succeeded in attracting only a tiny membership.<sup>2</sup> In the early months of 1938, workers failed to attend meetings to develop the union.<sup>3</sup> The large proportion of women in the labour force, the small size of firms (the vast majority of them family controlled), and the close contacts between employer and employee ("our trade is probably one of the few in which it exists at all" one advocate of unionisation in the hat industry wrote<sup>5</sup>) remained of primary importance in inhibiting the impulse to the foundation of unions. Unions were also slow to develop in the engineering industry - indeed, the weakness of organised labour may have been an important factor in inducing engineering firms to increase their

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1. Local Unemployment Index, November 1932 - January 1939.

2. Luton News, December 16, 1937, p. 13, col. 5.

3. Luton News, March 10, 1938, p. 9, col. 4.

4. James Dyer, etc., op. cit., p. 172.

5. Luton News, January 13, 1938, p. 9, col. 4.

investment in Luton. The Council, also, was hostile to unions (unlike the Councils of Halifax and Burnley), and refused to recognise them amongst its employees.<sup>1</sup> Workers moving to the town from the depressed areas found a feeble union structure when they arrived, and it took time for them to build it up. The migrants' initial period in Luton was devoted to acquiring houses, bringing down their families etc., and the recent memory of the slump in the areas they had left made them tread very carefully in the South. But by the mid-1930's, the engineering industry had been at least partially unionised. The crucial part migrants from the depressed areas had played in this was recognised by a hostile critic, Sir Walter Kent of Kent's Engineering Company: "It is ... apparent that the influx of industrial immigration to our town is exerting a profound effect upon the political complexion of the [Luton] division. Socialism in Luton is now a real danger."<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that two at least of the leading members of the Trades Council had had industrial and political experience in cities with vigorous radical traditions: one in Glasgow (from 1919 to 1926), and the other in Newcastle (1928-1932).<sup>3</sup> By the late 1930's, the new unionism was beginning to extract important concessions from the employers, particularly in wage bargaining in the motor industry, and in obtaining holidays with pay in the engineering industry. These were conceded for the first time in 1938.<sup>4</sup> However, real gains were not to be made until the Second World War had started.

The unions were also weak in Ipswich. In this town they had experienced temporary rapid growth during the second half of the

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1. Luton News, September 20, 1934, p. 8, col. 2.

2. *Ibid.*, October 15, 1936, p. 13, col. 6.

3. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1935, p. 11, col. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1938, p. 3, col. 1.

Great War, and at one stage 23% of the occupied population was affiliated to Ipswich Trades Council,<sup>1</sup> but the power of the Ipswich unions was broken in a series of strikes against proposed wage reductions in the early 1920's. By 1922, the income of the Trades Council in affiliation fees had fallen to £193, compared to the £454 raised in 1920.<sup>2</sup> Less than 5,000 workers struck in the General Strike,<sup>3</sup> whereas in 1918, 7000 engineers alone had come out<sup>4</sup> in support of one pay claim. The opportunity was taken after the failure of the General Strike to further weaken the unions, and both the Council and certain manufacturers victimised strikers. For example, no union official who worked for the tramways department regained his job after the strike.<sup>5</sup> This, followed by the widespread unemployment from 1930 to 1933, kept the unions weak and it was not till after economic recovery was well underweigh that the unions revived, with engineering leading the way. Whereas in 1924, approximately 25% of the engineering workers were in the union; by 1937, the proportion had risen to about half.<sup>6</sup> But the general revival of unions did not take place till the onset of the war.

The record of unions in the North was very different, even in depressed Burnley, where conditions for unions were most difficult and their experiences very chequered compared to those in Halifax. As late as 1930, after nine years of depression, the Weavers' Association alone had three times as many members as the complete Ipswich Trades Council: 42% of the occupied population were members of the Association.<sup>7</sup> There was a tradition of active participation in the affairs of trades unions in this part of Lancashire: for example, 89% of the members of Burnley Weavers'

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1. R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 155.

2. Pope and Skerritt, op. cit., p. 15.

3. Ibid., p. 17.

4. R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 159.

5. Pope and Skerritt, op. cit., p. 18.

6. Letter from V.R.Keeble, District Secretary, A.U.E.F.W., Ipswich, 26, March 1971.

7. Burnley News, March 29, 1930, p. 16, col. 1.

Association voted in the election of officials in 1938<sup>1</sup>, and this level of interest was not at all unusual, being the counterpart of the high voting in municipal elections. The union was able to demonstrate remarkable levels of support and organisation during the cotton strikes of 1930 to 1933. For example, the union brought out weavers, not only from sheds where wage reductions were threatened, but also members from sheds whose owners did not propose to lower wages.<sup>2</sup> Unions in this part of Lancashire tended to adopt very uncompromising attitudes when it came to a wages dispute. For example, 86% of the Burnley Miners voted against the proposed wage offer of 1924, whereas the national vote was divided almost evenly between those who favoured acceptance and those who rejected it.<sup>3</sup> When wage decreases were proposed, Burnley unionists were even more determined: for example, the Burnley News believed that Burnley weavers were opposed even to negotiations as a way out of the cotton strike of 1931, whereas those in Blackburn and Preston were in favour of them.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1930's, the Weavers' Association appears to have decided to concentrate its energies on maintaining the interests of those members who retained work - the unemployed would have to look after themselves. This was a harsh policy but the union could not have obtained work for the unemployed, and would have continued to fight on their behalf only at the expense of those who remained in work. These latter certainly benefited from the activities of the union on the wages front, and with the revival of the industry in the mid-1930's, the Association was active in recruiting the re-employed weavers. Many of these felt disillusioned with the union because of its policy of neglecting the unemployed,

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1. Burnley Express, March 30, 1938, p. 8, col. 5.

2. Economist, July 30, 1932, p. 220.

3. Burnley Express, April 12, 1924, p. 16, col. 2.

4. Burnley News, January 28, 1931, p. 8, col. 2.



and had failed to rejoin when they got jobs. The union organised a recruitment campaign in three stages: 2,000 personal letters were sent to people known to be non-members, and these letters were followed up by canvassing. Those who failed to respond were made "as conscious as possible of their meanness until they join the Association."<sup>1</sup> In three months, the membership of the Burnley Weavers' Association rose by 18%, representing a gain of 1,500 people.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that in this situation the union was aided by the local tradition of strong support for workers' associations, the experience in organisation and methods built up during the previous half century, and the fact that the union habit had been ingrained by the industrial experience of the 19th century. None of these factors was available on anything like the same scale in the South during this period.

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1. Burnley Express, February 27, 1937, p. 18; June 5, 1937, p.20, col.5.

CHAPTER 4 : POPULATION CHANGE AND PUBLIC HEALTH.

The industrial changes described in the previous chapter greatly influenced the population structure of the four towns. Unemployment in Burnley brought about a fall in the population as people left the town to look for work elsewhere. Halifax, in terms of population, stagnated. Both the Southern towns grew rapidly. In health also, the period witnessed sharp changes, though in this case, these were not to the disadvantage of the North. Throughout, Burnley and Halifax remained unhealthier than Ipswich and Luton, but by 1939 the gap between the two had been largely closed. The reasons for the greater ill health prevalent in the North lay partly in natural factors - the damp foggy climate, the comparative lack of sunshine; and partly in the industrial nature of the Northern towns - the bad housing, the jumbling together of factories and living quarters, the nature of employment in the mills<sup>1</sup>, and the polluted atmosphere.

The authorities could do very little about the first of these factors, but as regards the second, active councils could, and did bring about widespread changes. The plan of this chapter is, firstly, to survey population change, and then to compare the work of the public health departments.

Migration explains the greater part of the changes in population that occurred between 1919 and 1939, which are summarised in Table 4.1.

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1. One inquiry found that where "textile work" was numerically the principal occupation of women, the rate of puerperal mortality was particularly high. Ministry of Health. Report on an Investigation into Maternal Mortality, p. 74; 1936 - 1937 Cmd. 5422; Vol. XI, p. 78. The report also concluded that "many of the districts with high average puerperal mortality rates have an unfortunate social history and it appears probable that the living and working conditions had a prejudicial effect on the physique of the people which may not yet have been entirely eradicated." Ibid., p. 288, Vol. XI, p. 298.

TABLE 4.1: POPULATION MOVEMENTS 1921 - 1939<sup>1</sup>.(A): PERCENTAGE POPULATION CHANGE 1921 - 1939.

<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
- 17.2	- 2.5	+ 25.5	+ 76.6

(B): APPROXIMATE NATURAL CHANGE IN NUMBERS.

<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
+ 1286	+ 1360	+ 7752	+ 6590

(C): APPROXIMATE GAIN OR LOSS BY MIGRATION.

<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
- 19,072	- 4471	+ 12,511	+ 33,950

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Migration from the North occurred in two main forms. Firstly, people left to find work - this accounted for most of the movement. The flow of "economic" migration followed very closely the pattern of the depression. In Burnley, it reached a peak between 1930 and 1935 when the cotton slump was at its worst. More people left Halifax in the twenties than in the thirties - indeed there was a small inflow into Halifax after 1934 as a result of the rapid recovery there.<sup>2</sup> The 1930's was the decade during which migrants flooded into Luton and Ipswich. The electorate of one Luton ward, for example, rose by 350% between 1929 and 1938.<sup>3</sup> Many were Scots, Welsh and Northerners (by 1945, 13% of Luton's population had been born in these areas<sup>4</sup>) but most came from nearby towns and

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1. Census 1921 General Report, pp. 25 - 26.

General Register Office, National Registration 1939, Table 3.

Census 1951 Preliminary Report, Table III.

The Registrar-General's Statistical Review of England and Wales, 1921-1930, Tables, Part 1. Medical, Table 14; 1931-1939, Table 17.

The figures for migration are calculated by subtracting the natural increase of population stated in the Registrar-General's Statistical Reviews from the total increase of population between 1921 and 1939.

2. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, February 7, 1935, p. 7.

3. Figures for populations of wards were not collected in 1939, so electorates have been examined instead. Luton News, October 27, 1938, p. 5, col. 5; October 31, 1929, p. 9, col. 3.

4. F.Grundy and R.M.Titmuss, op. cit., pp. 43 - 44.

villages, drawn by higher rates of pay, greater variety of work, and the superior amenities available in Luton.<sup>1</sup> Migration accounted for about 83% of the population increase in Luton, and over 60% of that in Ipswich.<sup>2</sup> The great majority of migrants were poor and had no jobs waiting for them when they moved to the Southern towns. Migration contributed significantly to the reduction of the number living in poverty in the North, and added to it in the South. They also increased the already growing pressure on the social services in Luton and Ipswich.

Secondly, prosperous Northerners left the county boroughs for the surrounding countryside. Between 1921 and 1931, migration from Burnley C.B. took place to picturesque nearby rural districts such as Clitheroe.<sup>3</sup> The unindustrialised valleys near Halifax experienced considerable gains during the same decade: two of them adding more than ten per cent to their populations.<sup>4</sup> This process accelerated during the 1930's, and to some extent the loss of population was not as severe as Table 4.1 indicates because many people were not leaving the Northern towns altogether, but were merely moving beyond the county borough boundaries. There were three main reasons for this short distance migration: the

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1. Migrants to Ipswich were drawn to the town by similar factors. County Borough of Ipswich, Report of the Medical Officer of Health and School Medical Officer for the Year 1936 (1937), pp. 12 - 13.

2. Details Table 4.1.

3. Population Change 1921 - 1931 (%):      Burnley CB      Clitheroe RD

Natural increase by births and deaths	+ 1.6	+ 1.7
Gain or loss by migration	- 6.4	+ 26.2

Census 1931, County of Lancaster (Part I), Table 2.

4. Population Change 1921 - 1931 (%)

	<u>Natural change</u>	<u>Migration change</u>
Hipperholme UD	+ 0.0	+ 12.2
Shelf UD	- 1.4	+ 10.1
Halifax CB	- 0.3	- 0.8

Census 1931, County of Yorkshire: West Riding and York C.B. (Part I), Table 2.

environment was far more pleasant outside the towns; there was growing awareness that the risks to health diminished further away from urban centres; and finally the rural district rates were lower than those in the towns. The latter, in particular, helps to explain the virtually unanimous opposition of the inhabitants of these areas to proposals from the boroughs that they should absorb them.<sup>1</sup> The position of both towns as sub-regional centres for shopping, entertainment, health services etc., was in no way impaired by this process, but it was nevertheless viewed with resentment by councillors, who felt that people were benefiting from the towns' amenities without paying for them.

Migration influenced changes in the structure of the population during this period to produce marked regional contrasts. The proportion of the population aged 14 or less declined faster in the North than in the South; Northern marriage rates, once higher, declined to Southern levels; and finally, the proportion of old people in the North increased sharply.

TABLE 4.2: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION AGED 14 AND UNDER.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	25	22	27	27
1931	20	19	24	21
1939	18	18	25	24
% CHANGE 1921 - 1931	-5	-3	-3	-6
% CHANGE 1931 - 1939	-2	-1	+1	+3

1. E.g. 92% of the voters in Burnley R.D.C. voted against the Burnley amalgamation proposals, Burnley Express, April 3, 1935, p. 5, col. 2. 80% of the voters in Sowerby Bridge were opposed to the scheme to amalgamate the district with Halifax, Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 2, 1935, p. 3, col. 3.

2. Under 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  in 1939.

Census 1921, County Tables, Table 14.

Census 1931, County Tables, Table 14.

National Register 1939, Table II.

Thus, whereas in the North the proportion of the population under 14 fell in both the twenties and the thirties, in the South after 1931, the decline was reversed. Migration was partly responsible for these changes, but so was the fact that birth rates were lower in the North for most of the period.

TABLE 4.3: NUMBER OF BIRTHS PER THOUSAND WOMEN AGED 15 - 44.<sup>1</sup>  
FOUR YEAR AVERAGES

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1922-1925	6.5	5.8	7.2	6.6
1930-1933	5.0	4.8	6.6	5.5
1935-1938	5.1	4.9	5.9	5.7

Economic uncertainty and low earnings played a major part in reducing birth rates everywhere - people appear to have become increasingly conscious of the fact that the smaller the family, the more income was available to each member of it.

Whilst reductions in family size may have benefited individual families, the overall trend alarmed the authorities. The comments of the Medical Officer for Ipswich, Dr. Pringle, illustrate generally held views. There was cause for concern in national political terms: "Continuation in the fall in the Birth-rate will ... result in a diminishing population as is the case with France ... [which] is seeking security for her future politically and militarily, and committing suicide racially"<sup>2</sup>; and in terms of the of the quality of the population: "It is a matter of common knowledge that the worst educated, the most thriftless, the least efficient, and the most shiftless, live in slumdom and propagate their species with apparent indifference as to how their families

1. 1935 - 1938: Women aged between  $14\frac{3}{4}$  and  $44\frac{3}{4}$ .

Census 1921, County Tables, Table 14.

Census 1931, County Tables, Table 14.

National Register 1939, Table II.

Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1922 - 1930, Tables, Part 1. Medical, Table 14; 1931 - 1938, Table 17.

2. Ipswich C.B., Health Report, 1924, p. 9.

are to be reared and educated."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the education of the slum dweller became a priority of Health departments and local authorities, and was carried out by such means as Health Weeks, campaigns to publicise the causes of illness and the methods of prevention; school medical inspections; and, most drastically, slum clearance, moving people out of the slums into council houses.

Marriage rates in the North appear to have been lowered by the depression. During the 1930's the impression arose that unemployment did "not discourage people from marrying. A man and wife on twenty-three shillings a week are not far from the starvation line, but they can make a home of sorts."<sup>2</sup> It may have been true of the depressed areas generally that the dole "encouraged [marriages], for two could live better than one on the scale of unemployment allowances",<sup>3</sup> but marriage rates in Burnley and Halifax fell dramatically during the slump. Unfortunately, the Registrar-General's office did not collect statistics relating to marriage between 1930 and 1937, so it is not possible to trace in detail the changes in marriage rates during the entire period. However a comparison of the figures for 1921 - 1930 with those for 1937 - 1939 show how the position had altered by the outbreak of the war.

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1. Ipswich C.B., Health Report for the years 1921-1922-1923, p. 10.

2. G. Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 71.

3. C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918 - 1940 (1955), p.487.

TABLE 4.4: NUMBER OF PEOPLE MARRIED PER 1000 POPULATION AGED  
BETWEEN 20 AND 34.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
AVERAGE OF 1921-1925	15.1	13.3	7.3	8.6
" " 1926-1930	12.8	11.8	7.5	9.3
1937	8.8	N.A.	7.4	N.A.
1938	8.0	N.A.	7.4	N.A.
1939	9.0	9.4	10.4	N.A.

Comparing the most complete figures, Ipswich's rate for 1921-1930 was 7.4, whilst Burnley's was almost double that. By 1937-1939, there was scarcely any difference between the rates in the two towns. It seems at least possible that the slump caused this change, and the fall in the marriage rates in both Northern towns during the year of the General Strike may be an additional indication of the impact of economic dislocation on people's ability to afford marriage.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, the 1930's saw an increase in the North - especially large in Burnley - in the proportion of the population in the older age groups.

1. N.A. = Not available. Incomplete statistics were given for the period 1935-39. Somerset House was unable to provide any of the missing information; its compilation would take "hundreds of manhours".

Population 1921-1925 as in Census of 1921; population 1926-1930 as in Census of 1931; population 1937-1939 as in National Register 1939, Table II, population aged 19 $\frac{3}{4}$  - 34 $\frac{3}{4}$ .

Marriage statistics: Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1921 - 1939, Tables, Part II.Civil, Table F.

2. Marriage rate per 1000 people aged 20-34, 1926: Burnley 11.6; Halifax 11.8; Ipswich 7.2; Luton 8.6. Ibid., 1926, Table F.



TABLE 4.5: PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION AGED 55 AND OVER.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	17	16	15	16
1931	17	20	18	15.5
1939	22	23	20	15.5
% CHANGE 1921 - 1931	+0	+4	+3	-0.5
% CHANGE 1931 - 1939	+5	+3	+2	+0.0

The principal cause of this was the departure from the North of large numbers of young people in search of work and their arrival in the South.

Before assessing the contributions the local authorities made towards improving public health, it is necessary to consider how far Burnley and Halifax were unhealthier than Ipswich and Luton. There is little doubt that in many respects the situation was alarmingly worse in the North.

Infant mortality is perhaps the most delicate index of public health, and of the extent of malnutrition. After the First World War, more than a tenth of babies born in the Northern towns died before they were a year old; whereas in the South the figures were approximately one third lower.

TABLE 4.6: AVERAGE INFANT MORTALITY RATE PER 1000 BIRTHS, 1920 - 22.<sup>2</sup>

BURNLEY	120	HALIFAX	103	IPSWICH	66	LUTON	75
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1. Census 1921, County Tables, Table 14.

Census 1931, County Tables, Table 14.

National Register 1939, Table II. Population aged 54 $\frac{3}{4}$  and over.

2. Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1921-1922, Tables, Part 1. Medical, Table 14; Annual Report, 1920, pp. 87 - 88.

During the interwar period, public interest increasingly focussed on infant mortality, and the miserable situation in places like Burnley and Halifax added to the poor reputation of the North, and must have been an additional disincentive to the very few businessmen who were prepared to consider leaving the South. There were also wide health differences within the Northern towns themselves: the outer suburbs had lower mortality rates than the town centres,<sup>1</sup> which partly explains why people were anxious to get out of them.

Allied to the problem of a high infant mortality rate was a high death rate of mothers in childbirth.<sup>2</sup> Northern Medical Officers of Health suggested various causes: the high proportion of women working in factories, inadequate diet, Venereal Disease, and the activities of abortionists,<sup>3</sup> but claimed they did not have enough evidence to come to a conclusion. They were clear, however, about the remedy, advocating the provision of adequate ante and post natal clinics and maternity homes, together with ensuring that women knew about their existence.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, they argued in favour of an active housing policy, demolishing the slums, reducing overcrowding, and building council house estates. They attributed much of the ill health to what they termed "the Black Spots", small but numerous pockets of very bad housing dating from the early part of the nineteenth century, in which a whole series of illnesses tended to be endemic. An example from Halifax (Crossfields) illustrates this.

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1. Death rates in Burnley's healthiest ward (St. Andrew's), and its unhealthiest ward (St. Paul's) compared to the averages for Ipswich and Luton, 1922.

ST. ANDREW'S 11.3; ST. PAUL'S 26.9; IPSWICH 12.0; LUTON 11.5

Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1922, Table 14.

Burnley Express, June 9, 1923, p. 14, col. 2.

2. During the period 1924-33 Burnley and Halifax had puerperal mortality rates 20% above the average for England and Wales. Ministry of Health, Investigation into Maternal Mortality, p. 306, Cmd.5422.

3. County Borough of Halifax Health Department, Annual Report on the Health of the Borough For the Year 1922, pp. 8 - 10.

TABLE 4.7: CROSSFIELDS COMPARED TO HALIFAX C.B. AVERAGE OF 1918-22.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>CROSSFIELDS</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>
AVERAGE DEATH RATE PER THOUSAND	27.04	15.3
INFANT MORTALITY RATE PER THOUSAND	240	105
TUBERCULOSIS DEATH RATE " "	3.2	1.1
DEATH RATE FROM BRONCHITIS, PNEUMONIA, AND OTHER RESPIRATORY DISEASES PER THOUSAND	8.3	3.1

Not every illness, however, was more endemic in the North than the South: neither Luton nor Ipswich Councils had cause to be complacent. Death rates from Tuberculosis (which has been regarded particularly as a poverty disease) were as high in the South as in the North.<sup>2</sup> Infectious diseases such as diphtheria and typhoid showed no regional preference,<sup>2</sup> nor did the incidence of blindness and deafness amongst children.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Southern councils had to cope with extra pressures as a result of migration and fairly considerable natural increase of population.

1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, June 5, 1924, p. 5, col. 3.

2. Number of deaths from various diseases per 100,000 population, Average of 1920-1925.

	<u>Burnley</u>	<u>Halifax</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>Luton</u>
Tuberculosis, all forms	115.2	99	113.2	97.5
Diphtheria and croup	10.03	5.3	10.5	15.2
Enteric fever	2.1	1.5	0.42	4.7
Other respiratory diseases	14.7	13.4	16.8	11.6

Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1921-25, Tables, Part 1. Medical, Tables 20, 21; Annual Report, 1920, pp. 308-319, 404.

3. Incidence per 1000 children of blindness and deafness, average of 1923-1924.

	<u>Burnley</u>	<u>Halifax</u>	<u>East Suffolk</u>	<u>Bedfordshire</u>
Blindness	0.75	1.01	0.83	0.39
Deafness	1.06	1.11	1.02	0.78

No figures were given in the reports for Ipswich and Luton.

Board of Education, The Health of the School Child, 1923, p. 70; Ibid., 1924, p. 87.

However, there was one important limit to all local authority activities and this was that several branches of the health service were outside their control. The best hospitals were supported by voluntary contributions, not by the local authorities, and it was not until 1929 that the Poor Law hospitals were transferred to local authority control. Councils had no power to persuade doctors to move to their towns.

The health services in the four towns may be discussed under two principal headings: the 'public' sphere (e.g. Isolation hospitals, maternity homes, public baths, sewerage and drainage etc.) and the 'private', hospitals and general practitioners. The last two were very closely linked together, in as much as the hospitals depended on the part-time services of general practitioners. If a town was poorly supplied with the latter, then it was very likely that the hospitals would be understaffed too.

At the end of the First World War, the Northern towns tended to be better off in the public sphere, but deficient in the private, compared to Luton and Ipswich. Tables in the chapter on Finance show that local authority spending on health services in the North was slightly higher between 1922 and 1925 than it was in the South.<sup>1</sup> When the ratio of hospital beds and doctors to population is considered, however, the advantage lies clearly with the South, though none of the towns was overburdened with either. Authorities were not agreed about the number of hospital beds needed to satisfy the medical requirements of the population: estimates varied from 8.2 to 15 per 1000 people,<sup>2</sup> but only Ipswich matched even the lowest of these. For every 1000 people the town had ten hospital beds, compared to two in Luton, five in Burnley,

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1. Chapter 7, Table 7.9.

2. H.Eckstein, The English Health Services, pp. 46-7.

and seven in Halifax.<sup>1</sup> The tendency for Luton, which had been growing, and was to continue to grow as fast as almost any other town in England to lag seriously behind the other three towns in its provision for public health also shows itself in the number of doctors. For every 100,000 population, Luton had only 37 doctors, compared to 50 in Burnley, 55 in Halifax, and 72 in Ipswich.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of peace found all local authorities determined to improve their health services. Often this determination did not go beyond the planning stage, because the collapse of the boom and the ensuing economy campaign prevented the implementation of most plans. This was part of one of the most acute conflicts during the interwar period: how far could improvements go in a period of depression? The answer in the North was that, because of the serious nature of the health problem there, there could be no restriction. In the South the economisers, as will be shown below, were very much more successful.

Everywhere, there were large gaps in the health services. Burnley and Halifax had insufficient hospital beds, and they needed to make drastic improvements to their maternity facilities. There was no co-ordination anywhere between voluntary and poor law hospitals - indeed there often seemed to be antagonism between the two. The authorities in the voluntary hospitals tended to feel they set medical standards and regarded all efforts to pool resources as having the effect of lowering them. The same view tended to make many doctors reluctant to work in the poor law hospitals, which were often inadequately staffed. The task here for local authorities was to ensure that as soon as the poor law hospitals passed into their control there would be a sharp

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1. Burdett's Hospitals and Charities, 1922-23, pp. 185-340, 357-383, 387-394.

2. The Medical Directory 1922, pp. 1184-1234. The calculation above excludes retired doctors and those not in practice.

improvement in standards and that each hospital should be able to specialise in some field of medicine. Local authorities would also have to be prepared to abandon some of their independence in order to organise the hospital services of the county areas surrounding the towns to obtain more effective use of facilities, prevent duplication, and ensure that patients were not deprived of medical treatment because they lived outside the county borough boundaries. The gaps were more serious in the Southern towns. Unlike Burnley and Halifax, Ipswich had no homes for children with physical or mental complaints, the school medical services were inadequately staffed and the children infrequently inspected, and in Luton, the voluntary hospital was too small for the town's needs, nor was there a council maternity home.

Many fresh initiatives were needed, but unfortunately it was the concern of "economising" councillors to prevent them being taken. Southern "economisers" were more successful than Northern ones. Two examples may be used to illustrate this: the disputes over the Ipswich school for physically defective children, and over the Luton Maternity Home. Burnley and Halifax Councils had both types of institution from the start of the period.

The Medical Officer of Health for Ipswich advised the Council to open a special school for physically defective children, of whom there were almost 500 in the town, half of them suffering from non-infectious but active Tuberculosis.<sup>1</sup> Most were unable to attend a normal school. A scheme was drawn up and presented to the council, but its expense aroused the horror of the "economisers". Costs dominated the discussion, and even the leading "spender's" principal argument was about finance: he warned that "if these

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1. Ipswich Corporation, Proceedings at Meetings of the Town Council, Nov. 9, 1926-Nov. 8, 1927, pp. 187 - 202.

children were not attended to in time, they would become a burden on the rates."<sup>1</sup> Such advice was scarcely likely to arouse the social conscience of the Council, and the Deputy Mayor was the only supporter of the scheme he had himself drawn up. Even a modified proposal, presented a year later, failed to pass through the Council.<sup>2</sup> It became obvious that only a substantial reduction in cost would secure the Council's support for the establishment of the home and consequently, the third plan, submitted to the Council in 1929, contained drastic modifications. By eliminating the expensive medical equipment proposed in the original scheme, the cost was reduced from £66 to £39 a place, and the number of places cut by almost half, from 200 to 110. The original parkland site was replaced by a cheaper less rural one, and by these concessions, some of the "economisers" were persuaded to abandon their opposition,<sup>3</sup> and the school was built. It was nevertheless alarming that such strong opposition should arise to a scheme to tackle the outstanding weakness in Ipswich's health records: its tuberculosis death rates were as high as those in the North. There was thus no guarantee that any branch of local affairs would be free from the attention of the "economisers", even during a period of relative prosperity such as 1927 - 1929.

During the early twenties, one Luton baby in 13 died before it was a year old, but Luton Council made no attempt to improve this situation till it was pressed into action by an order from the Ministry of Health.<sup>4</sup> The Council had a choice as to the way it could satisfy the Ministry: it could either build a maternity home and equip and staff it for difficult births, or it could take over an empty house, employ a midwife, and use the place

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, June 23, 1927, p. 4, col. 3.

2. Ibid., March 15, 1928, p. 5.

3. Ibid., May 9, 1929, p. 5, col. 1.

4. Luton News, December 16, 1926, p. 13, cols. 4 - 5.

purely as an alternative for women whose home conditions made childbirth difficult or dangerous. The Health Committee decided, on grounds of expense, in favour of the second of these alternatives, but even though the scheme would cost only £500, it got the support of only two councillors.<sup>1</sup> It may have been that some councillors felt there was something immoral or unnatural about maternity homes, and several councillors, including the sole representative of the Labour Party, expressed the view that childbirth should take place in the home and nowhere else. However, it appears that expense was the most important consideration because when the Health Committee cut the cost by half, the Council passed the scheme.<sup>2</sup> Luton Council was not always so parsimonious; at the same meeting they voted the Mayor an expense account of £350 a year.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee bought a Victorian villa, equipped it with eight beds, and the place was soon overworked. Four years after its opening, nearly 20% of Luton's babies were being born in the home, and the rate of discharge had become so rapid there was danger to the mothers' health.<sup>3</sup> A second home was essential, but once again, the Council delayed making a decision. One proposed house purchase was so unsuitable that the ratepayers successfully petitioned the Ministry against it.<sup>4</sup> While the question of the new home was still being discussed, the unsuitability of the old one was tragically proved when a mother died. At the inquest upon her, the jury stated "that the Home is most unsuitable as a maternity home, and should be closed for all time."<sup>5</sup> The home had already been shut temporarily twice during the previous four months because of outbreaks of infectious disease which could not

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1. Luton News, December 16, 1926, p. 13, col. 7.

2. *Ibid.*, February 17, 1927, p. 9.

3. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1933, p. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, December 7, 1933, p. 12, col. 1.

5. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1934, p. 5, col. 1.



be traced to their source.<sup>1</sup> The scandal shocked the Council out of its mean and complacent attitude to public health, and the middle-thirties saw the planning and building not only of a large maternity home, but also of a substantial new general hospital, but it was alarming that it should take the death of a patient to make the Council put social responsibility before finance.

One yardstick for measuring the efforts of Northern and Southern councils is their reaction to the transfer of the responsibilities of the Boards of Guardians to the local authorities in 1929, which put the workhouses under the direct control of local government. It is interesting to note that Burnley and Halifax Councils spent time and money improving these institutions,<sup>2</sup> converting them into general hospitals which were able to compete in some aspects of medical care with the voluntary hospitals, whereas the Southern Councils did not. The attitude of Halifax and Ipswich Councils to the Poor Law Hospitals illustrates this regional contrast. Ipswich's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Pringle, was aware of the problems of dealing with a Poor Law Hospital. He wrote of the hostility many people felt to having treatment in such an institution, and stated that the task of the local authority was to bring about "a change of outlook"<sup>3</sup> He continued: "The first essential to the popularising of these institutions is the cultivation of the Hospital atmosphere as contrasted with that of the Workhouse."<sup>3</sup> However, his advice was ignored. Neither the Council, nor his successor, was interested in modernising the Hospital. Successive annual reports reveal that it remained "very largely ... for the treatment of the illnesses and degenerations of old people."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the percentage of cases admitted suffering

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1. Luton News, March 29, 1934, p. 10, col. 1.

2. Much of the increase in spending on direct health services in the North was the result of councils concentrating on improving the poor law hospitals.

3. Ipswich, Health Report, 1930, p. 89.

4. *Ibid.*, 1930, p. 90.

from dementia and senile decay rose from 18% in 1932 to 25% in 1935.<sup>1</sup>

The Medical Officer of Health for Halifax also argued that there were two aspects to the programme of improvement: firstly, the atmosphere of the workhouse had to be eliminated, and secondly, modern medical facilities and treatment had to be introduced. In 1932, the fulfilment of the first of these was begun with the transfer of chronic mental and senile patients who had "a deleterious effect on other patients" to the Public Assistance Committee's Homes.<sup>2</sup> Employment of workhouse inmates in portering tasks, which the Health Committee considered "objectionable and costly", was stopped and they were replaced by full time outsiders.<sup>2</sup> On the positive side, £1000 was spent modernising the Operating Theatre in 1932,<sup>3</sup> wages of most of the nursing staff were raised to the levels prevailing in similar institutions,<sup>4</sup> and full time Medical Staff were appointed.<sup>5</sup> In order to attract part time specialists, one ward was converted for the use of private patients, and this was soon "used to capacity."<sup>6</sup> The hospital<sup>was</sup> also encouraged to concentrate on difficult maternity cases. By 1938, it was operating purely as a medical institution, and as such was attracting attention - the number of admissions during 1938, which was a record year, rose by 1000 compared to 1937.<sup>7</sup>

Why should there have been this regional contrast? Clearly, the Northern councils were more active because they had to be: ill-health was so much worse there. It has already been demonstrated that the Northern towns at the start of the period were poorly provided with hospitals compared to the South - the acquisition of the Poor Law hospitals enabled them to catch up without having

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1. Ipswich, Health Report, 1932, p. 87; 1935, p. 106.

2. County Borough of Halifax Health Department, Annual Report on the Health of the Borough for the year 1932, p. 35.

3. Ibid., p. 34.

4. Ibid., 1936, p. 37.

5. Ibid., 1932, p. 33.

6. Ibid., 1937, p. 36.

7. Ibid., 1938, p. 31.

to face large bills for capital expenditure. Northern economisers were weak and ineffective when they tried to hinder changes and improvements to the health services. All Medical Officers of Health campaigned energetically about the prevention of illness, but they were listened to less attentively in the South than they were in the North because Luton and Ipswich Councils did not regard health as so pressing a problem.

No one political party could claim the credit for resisting the "economisers", even in the North. The view that the Labour Party was seeking "the organization and development of a unified Health Service for the whole community" or even trying to secure "the implementation of the legislation which had sprung out of the war period"<sup>1</sup> is not borne out as far as the Labour parties in these four towns are concerned. Local politics gave Labour parties the opportunity to push forward policies which parliament rejected, but they did not always use that opportunity, even when a scheme had the support of Conservatives and Liberals. The leading "economiser" on Burnley Council in 1921 was a Labour man who proposed the closure of both the new day nursery and the new maternity hospital.<sup>2</sup> The opposition of Luton's Labour councillor to any municipal maternity home has already been noted. Ipswich's first Labour M.P., the leader of the party in the town, R.F.Jackson, voted against the construction of a school for defective children.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that the greatest influence the Labour party had during this period was in local government, but there was no guarantee that that influence would always be used in the direction of progress.

Fortunately, even in the South, the "economisers" were able

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1. A.Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War, pp. 176 - 77.

2. Burnley Express, March 19, 1921, p. 15, col. 1.

3. East Anglian Daily Times, June 23, 1927, p. 4, col. 3.

only to put a break on improvement, not to stop it altogether. Much of the work done by health departments was too detailed or specialised to attract the attention of councillors, and the twenties saw considerable gains, in terms of falling death rates from the principal diseases, most of all in the North. As regards Infant Mortality for instance, there was a considerable narrowing of the North - South gap during the twenties.

TABLE 4.8: AVERAGE INFANT MORTALITY RATES PER 1000 BIRTHS, 1920 - 1922 COMPARED TO 1930 - 1931.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1920-1922	120	103	66	75
1930-1931	80	71.5	50.5	58
CHANGE	<u>- 40</u>	<u>-31.5</u>	<u>-15.5</u>	<u>-17</u>

It is apparent from the table that a concentrated effort by a council in the form of increased spending on staff and equipment such as Burnley's on infant mortality could produce beneficial results.

However, just as improvements were beginning to be made, they were threatened by two developments. Firstly, the onset of world depression caused widespread unemployment and the resulting fall in the incomes of many families endangered their health. Consequently, great efforts were needed in the field of preventive medicine to ensure that the depression did not undermine public health. In fact, the policy of the Government was the reverse of what was needed, and health spending was cut. This time, the people's health did suffer. Infant mortality rates were higher in 1934 than

1. Registrar-General, Annual Report, 1920, pp. 87-88; Statistical Review, 1921-2, 1930, Tables, Part 1. Medical, Table 14; 1931, Table 17.

they had been in 1930, except in Burnley.<sup>1</sup> The rise in these rates may indicate an increase in the amount of malnutrition amongst women, but no information on this point was gathered by Medical Officers. They did keep records about malnutrition amongst children, and these showed a rise in the early 1930's in Burnley, Halifax, and Ipswich. However, there was no official measure of malnutrition; it was upto individual doctors to give their opinion as to whether a child was undernourished or not, and these estimates varied from doctor to doctor. It seems clear that such methods greatly underestimated the extent of malnutrition. Ipswich Medical Officer of Health, who was critical of the Ministry of Health's standards, made a detailed enquiry into 50 families "taken at random, who have applied for assistance for various reasons to this Department,"<sup>2</sup> and found that malnutrition was far more widespread than had been indicated by the school medical inspection teams. He also observed that the period 1929 - 1932 saw increases in the number of verminous children,<sup>3</sup> and the number with scabies and nits.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of more extensive surveys in all four towns, it is impossible to state how great was the regional difference in the amount of malnutrition and disease amongst children. It is only possible to suggest that both were widespread, perhaps much more so than the authorities suspected for when researches were carried out in depth in Burnley and Ipswich, the rates soared; and that the trough of the slump was accompanied by a rise in malnutrition. In Burnley, the view of the Health Department had been that malnutrition didnot seriously affect children

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1. Infant Mortality Rates per Thousand Children under One.

	<u>Burnley</u>	<u>Halifax</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>Luton</u>
1930	75	66	42	42
1932	86	81	45	51
1933	75	92	46	46
1934	70	77	46	47

Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1930, Part 1, Table 14; 1932-1934, Part 1, Table 17.

2. Ipswich, Health Report, 1935, p. 144.

3. *Ibid.*, 1929, p. 101; 1932, pp. 115 - 120.

in the 1920's, and it was reported in 1929 that absenteeism from school was lower than it had been for ten years.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1930's however the Medical Officer found a sharp increase: the rate for every 1000 children rose from 0.5 in 1930 to 8.5 in 1933.<sup>2</sup> He enquired into the family situation of these children and found that the majority were not neglected slum dwellers but came from "reasonably good working class" homes, and were well looked after by their parents.<sup>3</sup> The problem was not so much lack of food as a badly balanced diet, and in this respect the Council could take action. School meals (provided in the North but not in the South, since the early twenties) were given free, and so was milk, to children the medical inspection teams thought needed it.<sup>4</sup> The improvement after 1933 was impressive, and the Council's actions may have been decisive for unemployment remained widespread, even as late as 1938, when the Medical Officer reported that despite almost twenty years of unemployment and low family incomes, there was a "general upward tendency in both weight and height in each group"<sup>5</sup> of schoolchildren.

The portrayal of the thirties as a "devil's decade", an era of lost opportunities cannot fairly be applied to the public health policies of any of these four local authorities. After the setback caused by the National Government's economy campaign, mortality rates resumed their downward trend. By the late thirties, though much preventable ill-health remained, conditions were better than they had ever been. Despite almost two decades of unemployment, Burnley kept pace with the Southern towns in improving public health - indeed the gap between North and South continued to narrow in the thirties as it had in the twenties.

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1. Burnley News, September 28, 1929, p. 13, col. 2.

2. Board of Education, The Health of the School Child, 1933, p. 20.

3. Burnley Express, November 18, 1933, p. 18, col. 1.

4. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1935, p. 18.

5. Board of Education, op. cit., 1938, p. 19.

The "most delicate" index of public health, infant mortality, showed an impressive reduction in the North and a slower one in the South, though of course, the Northern towns had further to go. Yet there was still room for improvement even in the South: abroad, the Dutch had succeeded in reducing their average infant mortality rate to 37 by 1936-38.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 4.9: MORTALITY RATES PER THOUSAND CHILDREN UNDER ONE.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>1922-3 (AVERAGE)</u>	<u>1938-9 (AVERAGE)</u>	<u>CHANGE</u>
BURNLEY	108	67	- 41
HALIFAX	100	58.5	- 41.5
IPSWICH	52	46	- 6
LUTON	65	41	- 24

Death rates from Tuberculosis were substantially reduced during this period in Burnley, Halifax, and Ipswich. Unfortunately it is not possible to compare the situation in Luton because the Statistical Review did not provide figures for this town in 1938 and 1939.

TABLE 4.10: DEATH RATE FROM TUBERCULOSIS, ALL FORMS, PER 100,000 POPULATION.<sup>3</sup>

	<u>1922-3 (AVERAGE)</u>	<u>1938-9 (AVERAGE)</u>	<u>CHANGE</u>
BURNLEY	128	84	- 44
HALIFAX	109	62	- 47
IPSWICH	107	59	- 48

1. C.L.Mowat, op. cit., p. 515.

2. Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1922-3, Part 1, Table 14; 1938-9, Part 1, Table 17.

3. Ibid., 1922-3, Tables 20, 21; 1938-9, Table 24.

These examples can be multiplied: in some cases Northern death rates were reduced by half, or even by two thirds (e.g. bronchitis) though cancer continued to claim more and more victims, except in Luton.

TABLE 4.11: DEATH RATE FROM CERTAIN DISEASES PER 100,000 PEOPLE.<sup>1</sup>

<u>PNEUMONIA (ALL FORMS)</u>	<u>1922-3 (AV.)</u>	<u>1938-9 (AV.)</u>	<u>CHANGE</u>
BURNLEY	127	66	- 61
HALIFAX	124	59	- 65
IPSWICH	77	64	- 13
LUTON	60.4	46.5	- 13.9
<u>BRONCHITIS</u>			
BURNLEY	165	34	-131
HALIFAX	142	26	-116
IPSWICH	98	26.5	- 71.5
LUTON	86	26	- 60
<u>CANCER</u>			
BURNLEY	125	161	+ 36
HALIFAX	150	195	+ 45
IPSWICH	144	169	+ 25
LUTON	133	124	- 9
<u>INFLUENZA</u>			
BURNLEY	41.2	11.8	- 29.4
HALIFAX	28.8	11.3	- 17.5
IPSWICH	30.3	25.5	- 4.8
LUTON	35.4	23 <sup>2</sup>	-----

1. Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1922-3, Part 1, Tables 20, 21; 1938-9, Part 1, Table 24.

Luton figures: Borough of Luton, Annual Report on the Health, Sanitary Conditions and c., of the Borough of Luton for the Year 1939, p. 31.

Populations as in: Census 1921; National Register 1939.

2. 1940 only. Luton, Health Report, 1939, p. 9.



What were the causes of the improvement in public health and why was it more marked in the North than in the South, despite the depression? First of all, the Northern towns had been so much more unhealthy at the beginning of the period, and thus had a far greater incentive and room for improvement. The Southern councils tended to be much more complacent, and consequently they did not make so intensive an effort, nor did they interpret their powers generously. By 1934-1937, spending per head on 'direct' health services was higher in the North than in the South.<sup>1</sup> In the Northern towns, the largest increase came during the thirties: the principal factor was the modernisation of the Poor Law hospitals. Consequently both Northern councils had much wider control of their hospital services and by the end of the thirties, the regional difference in the ratio of hospital beds had disappeared. Rising populations meant that the Southern towns had to move fast to stay in the same place, whereas by 1938 Burnley and Halifax had passed the lowest estimate of the number of beds needed to cover the hospital requirements of the population adequately.

TABLE 4.12: NUMBER OF HOSPITAL BEDS PER 1000 POPULATION, 1922 - 1938, AND INCREASE IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BEDS, 1922 - 1938.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
BEDS PER 1000 POPULATION 1922	5	7	10	2
BEDS PER 1000 POPULATION 1938	9.8	11.4	9.5	4.25
TOTAL HOSPITAL BEDS 1922	513	694	776	122
TOTAL HOSPITAL BEDS 1938	839	1105	951	429

1. See Table 7.9, Chapter 7.

2. Burdett's Hospitals and Charities, 1922-1923, pp. 185-340, 357-383, 387-394.

The Hospital Surveys (1945), Appendices I and II.

Populations as in: Census 1921, National Register 1939.

It appears that the two Northern towns and Ipswich were unusually active not only in comparison with Luton, but also in relation to the rest of the country for it has been stated of Britain as a whole that "the number of beds failed to keep pace with the growth of population"<sup>1</sup>. During the depression voluntary hospitals were forced to rely much more on contributions from the local authorities who tended to link them with demands that the voluntary hospitals co-operate more effectively with the former poor law hospitals. Consequently, the Hospital Surveys of 1945 described the relations between the authorities controlling the two Burnley hospitals as "good"<sup>2</sup> whereas there was "no proper liaison"<sup>3</sup> between the two main Ipswich hospitals, and in Bedfordshire "accommodation and specialist services are both deficient, particularly in the south of the county, where the growth of population has been most marked in recent years".<sup>4</sup>

Secondly the ratio of doctors to population was maintained, in the North as well as in the South, despite the slump.

TABLE 4.13: NUMBER OF DOCTORS, AND RATIO OF DOCTORS TO POPULATION, 1921 COMPARED TO 1938.<sup>5</sup>

	<u>NUMBER</u>		<u>RATIO PER 100,000 POPULATION</u>	
	<u>1921</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>1938</u>
BURNLEY	52	57	51	67
HALIFAX	55	59	55	61
IPSWICH	57	80	72	80
LUTON	21	43	37	43

1. Brian Abel-Smith, The Hospitals 1800-1948. A Study in Social Administration in England and Wales (1964), p. 382.
2. Ministry of Health, Hospital Survey. The Hospital Services of the North-Western Area (1945), p. 37.
3. Ibid., The Hospital Services of the Eastern Area, p. 16.
4. Ibid., The Hospital Services of London and the Surrounding Area, p. 52.
5. Excluding retired and non-practising doctors. The Medical Directory, 1922, pp. 1184-1234; 1938, pp. 1371-1401.

It is clear from Table 4.13 that not only the ratio of doctors to population, but also the total number, increased in the North. There does not appear to have been a drift of doctors away from the North to the more prosperous parts of the country. It would appear that finance and an attractive environment were not the factors uppermost in the considerations of doctors as to where they should practise. It may have been that the growing awareness of the plight of the North as regards health was producing a response from socially conscious members of the medical profession. Secondly, the improvement in the Northern educational systems that took place at this time, together with the strong sense of local pride, may have combined to encourage Burnley and Halifax born doctors to return home to practise.

The spread of education about the causes of ill health and the ways whereby illness could be avoided was also very influential. Councils were vigilant about educating the public. Halifax Council started health weeks in 1922<sup>1</sup>, and by 1937, most households were circularised with booklets or leaflets.<sup>2</sup> Similar efforts were made in the Southern towns, though more spasmodically, because health weeks were vulnerable to economising attacks. Although Ipswich Council's campaign created considerable public interest (8,600 people attended lectures on ante-natal care, cancer, etc., in 1928)<sup>3</sup>, it was abandoned in 1931 because of the need for economy.<sup>4</sup> Such efforts were essential nonetheless, for widespread ignorance remained about the causes of disease and its treatment. For example, in Ipswich, nearly 40% of parents whose children had been found to have bad teeth, refused to allow them to have treatment, despite receiving letters advising this from the Health Department.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Halifax, Health Report, 1922, pp. 48 - 49.

2. Ibid., 1937, p. 5. 4,000 booklets were issued, and 20,000 leaflets; nine public lectures were given; and 25 special lectures at Maternity and Child Welfare Centres.

3. Ipswich, Health Report, 1928, p. 76.

4. Ibid., 1931, p. 84.

5. Ibid., 1929, pp. 116 - 118.

Educating the public was thus a major task of the local authorities, and by perseverance, it produced results, creating a popular demand for the facilities that had been set up.<sup>1</sup>

By 1939 the average person in these four towns, and the average Northerner especially, was much healthier than his counterpart of 1919 had been. Greater activity by Health Departments, co-ordination of services, concentration of money and staff on weak points such as high Infant Mortality or Tuberculosis rates, had brought some remarkable results, though how far the all-round improvement was the consequence of direct health measures, and how far it was a result of the general improvement in living habits is very difficult to say. One important contributory factor towards the latter was the housing estate and before a final conclusion about the causes of improvement to public health can be made, the contribution made by housing to it must be assessed.

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1. For example, Ipswich Medical Officer reported that there had been a large increase in the number of cases examined at the Ante and Post Natal Clinics. He concluded that this "proves the validity of the contention that wherever such facilities are provided there are large numbers ... who will be ready to avail themselves of the benefits." Ipswich, Health Report, 1928, p. 57.

CHAPTER FIVEHOUSING

There is one important obstacle to making a comparison between the housing activities of these four towns, which is that the basic problem differed from one region to the other. In the North, the poor quality of the housing stock needed to be drastically improved; in the South, new estates were required for expanding populations. The mass of work in the North devolved upon councils only - private enterprise was not prepared to take on this sort of responsibility; in the South, both the private sector and the public authorities were active.

During this period, the provision of housing became one of the most important obligations of councils. However, despite the application of large amounts of money, men, and materials, the problems were nowhere near solved by 1939. Many of the slums erected during the Victorian period remained in the North, overcrowding grew in the South and was greatly exacerbated by the pressures of the Second World War. One of the difficulties councils faced during the interwar period was that they were working in the dark - no attempt was made to calculate the extent of the problems, such as how many houses were defective; what proportion had to be demolished; what the demand for council houses was, and how many of those seeking accommodation could afford to pay a private rent. In part this was a function of the fact that the intervention of local government in housing was a new development, and councils had very little experience in providing such a service. They were further hampered in the North because the Government for a long time misunderstood the nature of the housing problem - the basic

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endeavour during the 1920's was to provide new houses ("homes for heroes"); not till half way through the period did the Government participate in the endeavour to get people out of the slums. Government financial assistance accordingly went mainly to the benefit of the South; the North received comparatively little help till the 1930's.

Exact measures of the housing requirements of these towns were not made during this period, but a partial picture can be built up from the fragmentary evidence that is available. That the quality of housing in the North was greatly inferior to that in the South was obvious, despite all the slum clearance and rehousing that was done between 1920 and 1950, in the census returns of 1951<sup>1</sup>, and indeed, is still apparent from visits to these towns today. The censuses of 1921 and 1931 did not provide a great deal of information about the quality of housing - but they did calculate the average sizes of occupied dwellings and showed how much smaller these were in the North.

TABLE 5.1: AVERAGE SIZE OF OCCUPIED DWELLINGS (NUMBER OF ROOMS)<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	4.23	3.73	5.40	5.07
1931	4.21	3.69	5.50	5.07

The above figures are averages. In the older central wards, houses were considerably smaller. It was here that most of the very tiny dwellings were concentrated.

1. Census 1951 Housing Report (1956), Table 13.

2. Census 1921 County Tables, Table 10.

Census 1931 Housing Report and Tables (1935), Table 14.

TABLE 5.2: PERCENTAGE OF STRUCTURALLY SEPARATE DWELLINGS WITH THE FOLLOWING NUMBER OF ROOMS IN 1931.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1 ROOM	0.9	3.8	0.4	0.0005
2 ROOMS	6.0	21.9	2.0	0.8
3 ROOMS	8.4	24.4	2.0	1.6
THE ABOVE AS A % OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF STRUCTURALLY SEPARATE DWELLINGS	<u>15.3</u>	<u>50.1</u>	<u>4.4</u>	<u>2.4</u>
NUMBER WITH 3 ROOMS OR LESS	4,025	14,658	954	418

Thus, the proportion of small dwellings was nearly three times as large in Burnley as in Ipswich, whilst in Halifax, half the town's housing consisted of dwellings with three or less rooms. Many of these in the North were back to back houses, and so also were substantial numbers of the four and five room houses. The Medical Officer of Health for Halifax estimated in 1932 that at least 50% of the houses in the town were back to backs, and that many of them were "100 years of age and upwards, and are consequently worn out. Bulging walls - in many cases held by tie-rods - are a particular feature of this type of house." He concluded: "There is a real need for the demolition of such houses as soon as possible."<sup>2</sup> These houses were highly insanitary - lavatories were often a considerable distance away; circulation of air was poor; damp and dry rot were endemic. Many were verminous.<sup>3</sup>

The second main problem was overcrowding.

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1. Census 1931, County Tables, Table 10.

2. Halifax, Health of the Borough, 1932, pp. 99 - 100.

3. *Ibid.*, 1938, p. 98.

TABLE 5.3: PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL PRIVATE FAMILY POPULATION LIVING  
TWO OR MORE TO A ROOM.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	5.64	13.19	4.09	3.70 <sup>2</sup>
1931	4.18	10.08	2.21	1.89

Again, the position was most serious in Halifax, but by the mid-1930's, much of the pressure had been eased in the North, by a combination of house building and migration. The Overcrowding Survey published in 1936<sup>3</sup> revealed the improvement there (percentage of working class families overcrowded: Burnley 1.3, Halifax 5.2), but showed that the pressures that were to come in the South at end of the period, and especially in Luton, as a result of migration, had not yet made themselves felt (percentage of working class families overcrowded in Ipswich 1.7<sup>3</sup>; percentage of all dwellings overcrowded in Luton 0.5<sup>4</sup>).

Thirdly, there was the problem of families without homes of their own: this was a major cause of overcrowding. Unfortunately, there are no figures available for the late 1930's, but the statistics for migration in Table 5.5 show how much pressure this was causing during the period.

TABLE 5.4: EXCESS OF PRIVATE FAMILIES OVER DWELLINGS.<sup>5</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	220	376	1159	588
1931	540	324	835	449

The broad outlines of the housing situation as it affected the four towns are apparent from the above tables. Housing quality was

1. Census 1931, Housing Report, Table 14.
2. Census 1921, Bedford, Table IX.
3. Ministry of Health, Report on The Overcrowding Survey in England and Wales 1936 (1936), Table IX.
4. Ibid., Table F. The percentage of working class families overcrowded was not presented for Luton in this Survey.
5. Census 1931, Housing Report, Table 5.  
Census 1921, Bedford, Tables 3, 10.  
Census 1931, Bedford, Part 1, Tables 3, 10.



extremely poor in the North: slum clearance was a priority. In the Southern towns, there was a housing shortage that was to grow steadily worse with the large population movements of the 1930's. New council house estates were vitally needed.

The test of regional effort is not how many houses were built, but how far demand was satisfied. It is possible at this point to make a fairly broad comparison between the four towns as to the extent to which they tackled their housing problems.

In Table 5.5, the figures for the number of slums requiring to be demolished are minima. The Burnley total is the number proposed for immediate demolition; the figure would undoubtedly have been far larger had more finance been available. The Ipswich total refers to the number of slums that were demolished between 1919 and 1937.<sup>1</sup> Patches of bad housing still remained, especially in the older parts of the town near the river. Luton Medical Officer stated that there were "no unhealthy areas or houses which should be demolished" in 1919,<sup>2</sup> which was a complacent view; later Medical Officers were able to find slums in Luton.

Columns II and III indicate roughly the extent of demand for new houses from migrants and private families. It is obvious that this demand was much greater in the South; indeed in Burnley, migration from the town was releasing houses - some of them, at least, of good quality, and generally at low rents - for slum dwellers to occupy. Column IV shows the number of council houses that were built between 1919 and 1938. No town council built enough houses during this period. The record of Luton was alarmingly poor and puts the town in a category of its own.

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1. Ipswich, Health Report, 1937, p. 44.

2. Luton News, December 4, 1919, p. 5, col. 3.

TABLE 5.5: THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND HOUSING.I. SLUM CLEARANCE DEMAND.

BURNLEY: at least 4,077 <sup>1</sup>	HALIFAX: at least 15,000 <sup>2</sup>
IPSWICH: 2,307	LUTON: none.

II. NUMBER OF MIGRANTS 1921 - 1939<sup>3</sup>

BURNLEY: - 19,072	HALIFAX: - 4,471
IPSWICH: + 12,511	LUTON: +33,950

III. INCREASE IN NUMBER OF PRIVATE FAMILIES 1921-1931.<sup>4</sup>

BURNLEY: + 1,660	HALIFAX: + 2,034
IPSWICH: + 3,835	LUTON: + 4,586

IV. NUMBER OF COUNCIL HOUSES BUILT BETWEEN 1919-1938.<sup>5</sup>

BURNLEY: 2,392	HALIFAX: 2,632
IPSWICH: 2,981	LUTON: 1,088

V. TOTAL CAPITAL EXPENDITURE ON HOUSING 1921-1937.<sup>6</sup>

BURNLEY: £1,200,616	HALIFAX: £936,874
IPSWICH: £1,494,852	LUTON: £593,869

1. Burnley Express, October 29, 1919, p. 6, col. 4; September 30, 1933, p. 18, col. 3.
2. Halifax, Health Department, 1932, p. 99.
3. These figures are calculated by subtracting the natural increase of population stated in the Statistical Reviews of the Registrar-General from the total increase of population between 1921 and 1939.
4. Census 1921, Bedford, Table 3; 1931, Housing Report, Tables 5, 14.
5. Burnley Express, January 1, 1930, p. 4, col. 1; January 8, 1938, p. 6, col. 1; p. 9, col. 1.  
Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 30, 1939, p. 7, col.3. A further 402 houses were in course of erection in March 1939.  
East Anglian Daily Times, May 3, 1938, Supplement, p. 9, col.2.  
F.C.Hamel to E.D.Smithies, 8 October 1971. Number built by 1939 in Luton.
6. Ministry of Health, Annual Local Taxation Returns, England and Wales, 1920-21, Part II; - 1934-35, Part II; Local Government Financial Statistics, England and Wales, 1935-36 - 1936-37, Part II.

Considerable efforts were made in the other three - the temptation to take advantage of the fact that people were leaving Burnley, and to economise on housing, was resisted. Column IV shows that Ipswich Council built more houses than both Burnley and Halifax, but this is only a partial indication of the effort of the Northern councils, because Burnley and Halifax were involved in substantial programmes of slum clearance. Statistics about the number of slums demolished do not appear to be available, so Column V includes the amount of money spent overall on housing to give a comparison of the total effort of these councils.

All other factors being equal, this was an impressive effort on the part of three of the towns. However, the other factors were not equal. Burnley, in particular, was in depression for much of the period, and it is against the background of considerable economic difficulties, especially in the 1930's, that the Northern towns' housing policies must be considered.

In the North, demand remained strong for new houses, despite migration, and the large Labour parties helped to ensure that the Conservative-Liberal controlled councils remained aware of the fact. In 1929, for example, there were four applicants for every council house built in Burnley.<sup>1</sup> Critics of council house building, such as the Editor of the Burnley Express, were silenced by such facts. He commented of his own earlier view that the housing problem in the town was not serious: "What can we say in face of figures like these?"<sup>1</sup> Both Northern councils - but Halifax especially - believed that housebuilding, like the construction of roads, was a better means of dealing with the unemployed than paying them the dole. Burnley Council resumed house building in 1932 (when the Council was still

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1. Burnley Express, July 6, 1929, p. 9, col. 4.

under Conservative-Liberal control)<sup>1</sup> and between October 1934 and September 1936 512 council houses were completed,<sup>2</sup> compared to only 171 completed during the same period by Ipswich Council.<sup>2</sup> The Southern councils were much more impressed by the retrenchment campaigns of the early 1930's and over-reacted to the depression by cutting back on their housing plans.

The Southern councils assumed that private enterprise was providing enough houses to enable the public sphere to slacken its efforts. The authorities in Ipswich argued from the large number of private enterprise houses that were being built in the town that the housing problem was being solved. The Medical Officer of Health concluded "that the housing position is no longer acute ... the housing requirements of the community are nearing satisfaction."<sup>3</sup> The Council therefore did not greatly expand its housing programme when the slump was over. The error the Medical Officer of Health and the Council made was to assume that the housing shortage could be solved by "filtering up", but most of the people in real need could not afford to move out of the slums to more expensively rented accommodation. Nor could they compete with the rents the better paid workers were able to afford, and they certainly could not manage to buy the vacated houses. Competition for rented private enterprise houses was forcing rents up during the 1930's - a very important factor in keeping the poor poor. Fortunately, the Conservative-Liberal controlled Ipswich Council soon realised what the position was (and the sharp gains the Labour party was making in the town during the early 1930's perhaps helped to concentrate their minds) so the end of the period saw a burst of council house building. Between 1st. October 1937 and March 31st.

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1. Burnley Express, October 8, 1932, p. 5.

2. Ministry of Health, Housing. House Production, Slum Clearance etc. England and Wales, 31st. March 1935 - 30th. September 1936.

3. Ipswich, Health Report, 1936, pp. 16 - 17.

1939, 1297 houses were completed by the Council,<sup>1</sup> although such a rapid pace of building forced up prices of land, materials and labour, and made the houses comparatively expensive, and therefore highly rented. Even before the housing boom of the thirties, a regional difference was emerging in the cost of building council houses. In the late twenties, they were built in Burnley for £400 - £450,<sup>2</sup> in Halifax for £415,<sup>3</sup> in Ipswich prices ranged between £419 and £476<sup>4</sup>, and in Luton between £524 and £552.<sup>5</sup>

In Luton, however, there was no large increase in the number of council houses built during the 1930's: for example, between 1st. October 1934 and 31st. March 1939, a period of almost unparalleled boom in the town, the Council built only 196 houses.<sup>6</sup> Luton Council was inactive for several reasons. Its experience under the Addison scheme, when the final cost of each of the 116 houses completed worked out at £1098, certainly gave the Council a very bad scare.<sup>7</sup> It was true that this cost was a third higher, for instance, than the houses built by Halifax Council, which cost £680.<sup>8</sup> But many other councils were badly caught out too: Burnley's houses cost £948,<sup>9</sup> and Ipswich's £900,<sup>10</sup> and neither council was deterred from taking on ambitious schemes later in the 1920's. It seems more probable that the basic factor was a fundamental opposition amongst the majority of Luton councillors for most of this period to the principle of the Council having to get involved in this additional (and expensive) service. One member (M. Barford) who was to hold key positions on the Council until the late 1930's stated "affirmatively

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1. Ministry of Health, Housing, 31st. March 1938 - 31st. March 1939.
  2. Burnley Express, June 8, 1929, p. 4.
  3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, August 27, 1926, p. 3, col. 1.
  4. East Anglian Daily Times, February 9, 1928, p. 4, col. 2.
  5. Luton News, September 6, 1928, p. 8, col. 3.
  6. Ministry of Health, Housing, 31st. March 1935 - 31st. March 1939.
  7. Luton News, March 19, 1925, p. 11, col. 1.
  8. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 2, 1922, p. 5, col. 2.
  9. Burnley Express, April 3, 1920, p. 3, col. 3.
  10. East Anglian Daily Times, September 23, 1920, p. 12, col. 2.

and without equivocation that had it not been for the obligation placed on local authorities to build houses, the probability was that this Council would never have embarked" on a housing programme.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion he claimed that "municipal housing was always done at a loss."<sup>2</sup> Councillors holding similar views were reinforced in them by the attitude of the large number of small builders who sat on the Council. There were nine of them altogether; no other council had so many. Burnley for instance had three, and Halifax also three. They were a formidable pressure group against the Council building houses, and one of their leading members (Attwood, a Committee Chairman) expressed their real fear quite clearly - that the council's responsibility for housing would grow so large that "the small speculative builder would be done, because he could not compete."<sup>3</sup> Private enterprise continued to dominate the building business overwhelmingly in Luton (7,171 houses were completed between 1st. October 1934 and 31st. March 1939).<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless in 1936 there were approximately 1000 people on the housing list.<sup>5</sup> Yet proposals to build council houses on a large enough scale to satisfy at least some of this demand were consistently rejected during the 1930's. For example, in 1936 a proposal to buy enough land to build nearly a thousand houses was turned down by the Council on the basis that the land was too expensive. It was argued by opponents of the scheme that the Council should wait till the boom broke and prices of land, men and materials fell.<sup>6</sup> Yet this argument could all too easily be turned on its head. When there was a depression, when prices and wages were falling, it was argued that municipal expenditure must be kept to a minimum for fear of aggravating the depression.

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1. Luton News, March 9, 1922, p. 7, col. 5.

2. Ibid., April 11, 1929, p. 9, col. 1.

3. Ibid., June 5, 1930, p. 9, col. 2.

4. Ministry of Health, Housing, 31st. March 1935 - 31st. March 1939.

5. Luton News, March 19, 1936, p. 13, col. 6.

6. Ibid., March 19, 1936, p. 13, cols. 6-7; p. 19, col. 2.

This argument was successfully used in 1932 against a group of Luton councillors who proposed that because there were 1500 people on the housing list, the Council should restart house building.<sup>1</sup> It seems that no time could be propitious for Luton Council to build houses. So the poor, who could not afford to buy a private enterprise built house, had to rely on rented accommodation. Competition for these houses and flats sent rents rapidly up, as migrants flooded into the town. The housing shortage was a source of real friction between the Luton-born and migrants to the town, perhaps not surprisingly so when Luton people spent - in one case - nine years on the housing list only to be told they did not qualify for a house at the end of it.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, the real culprits - the incompetent Housing Department and the complacent Council - were identified and were not allowed to escape criticism. The Labour party used the deficiencies of the Council as a platform for campaigning, and dissatisfaction about housing became a cause of considerable support for the party.

Luton Council's failure to build substantial numbers of houses, and the fact that it had very few slums to demolish, meant that it did not have to face one of the main dilemmas that perplexed the other three councils: for whom were they building council houses? The awkwardness of this question only became apparent as the period proceeded. The first completed council houses (those built under the Addison Scheme) were so expensive that many people who were comparatively well-to-do had to be accepted as tenants. In Luton, the average weekly rents of privately owned three bedroom houses were 7s.6d to 8s.6d a week, yet the Borough Accountant estimated that similar sized council houses would

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1. Luton News, October 6, 1932, p. 9, col. 5.

2. Ibid., July 16, 1936, p. 9, col. 1.

have to be let at rents between 12s. and 23s.6d a week to recover even a proportion of the cost.<sup>1</sup>

With the fall in prices, however, house building became very much cheaper, and rents fell, but they never became so low that people living in the worst conditions would be able to afford them. Councils continued to take as tenants only the better paid workers. Up to a point this was understandable - as one Ipswich councillor warned: "The whole municipal housing system would break down were houses allocated to tenants who would not be able to pay."<sup>2</sup> Yet councils were nonetheless failing in one crucial respect - there were unemployed and badly paid ex-heroes and these deserved and needed sound accommodation as much as the well paid. Their only hope while councils remained financially selective in distributing houses was "filtering up", moving out of the slums into the better rented accommodation vacated by those who were transferring to council houses, or were buying their own property. What was required was a reversal of the economic beliefs of the majority of councillors: they had to accept that houses must be let to people who were "risks", who might be unable to pay their rents regularly, even though these were low. In many cases, the council would not get back from the tenant the money it had invested in a house. It is not surprising that many Conservative and Liberal councillors found accepting these ideas extremely difficult. If they were applied to their own businesses, the result would be in no doubt: bankruptcy. Yet such was the extent of poverty in these towns and the need to shift people out of dirty and diseased slums, that councils - still under Conservative and Liberal control - came round to accepting the idea that property should be let to risky

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1. Luton News, April 22, 1920, p. 5, col. 2.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, August 4, 1932, p. 2, col. 2.



tenants. By the late 1920's, rents had fallen considerably from their peak post-war levels; during the 1930's they were to decline further. But this did not mean that councils acquiesced easily in the new policy.

TABLE 5.6: RENTS OF NEW COUNCIL HOUSES.

	<u>1920-1923</u>	<u>1936-1938</u>
BURNLEY <sup>1</sup>	12s.	2s.11d - 10s.9d
HALIFAX <sup>2</sup>	9s. average	6s.5d average
IPSWICH <sup>3</sup>	15s. - 17s.6d	8s.8d - 9s.10d
LUTON <sup>4</sup>	14s.	11s.6d.

Slum dwellers moving to council houses were subjected to humiliating examination and treatment of their property. Councils obviously did not wish disease to spread from the slums to the new estates, but descriptions of the methods of prevention adopted have an unpleasant ring: "The household effects of tenants moving from a slum clearance area into a Council house are invariably disinfested. They are collected in a gas-tight trailer van and taken to the Charlestown Disinfecting Station, where soft goods are put through a steam disinfector whilst the other articles are left in the van and treated with HCN gas."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, this treatment proved too violent for many beds and bedding, which disintegrated. The Council provided replacements, and the tenants paid for them on the hire purchase system.<sup>6</sup> In Halifax, the District Sanitary Inspector kept a "black list" of tenants thought likely to be dirty and periodic visits were made to their houses to check up on them.<sup>7</sup> In Burnley, officials were permanently on call to instruct tenants in the "use of fittings" and to make sure they

1. Burnley Express, February 9, 1929, p. 9, col. 2; June 1, 1929, p. 10, col. 1; January 19, 1938, p. 8, col. 3.
2. W.E.Churms to E.D.Smithies, 13 October 1971.
3. East Anglian Daily Times, May 12, 1921, p. 3, col. 3; March 28, 1929, p. 2, col. 5; December 16, 1937, p. 11, col. 1.
4. Luton News, April 22, 1920, p. 5, col. 2; October 24, 1929, p. 9, col. 5; March 19, 1936, p. 13, cols. 6 - 7.
5. Halifax, Health Report, 1937, pp. 112 - 113.  
Burnley Express, July 3, 1936, p. 18, col. 2.
6. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 5, 1939, p. 5, cols. 4 - 5.
7. Halifax, Health Report, 1937, p. 113.

continued to use them in the correct way.<sup>1</sup> Luton Council kept black lists of "doubtful tenants, for observation at intervals; and careless tenants, for continual observation."<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to escape the conclusion that in agreeing to move into a council house, slum dwellers sacrificed a certain amount of their freedom and independence. They also sacrificed a considerable proportion of their income - too much for many of them. The council housing estates quickly developed reputations as somewhat unpleasant and expensive places in which to live. A survey by the Halifax Council of Social Welfare, carried out in 1931, reported that slum dwellers had three objections to living on the estates - one directly, and one indirectly referred to the additional expense involved: rents were too high; as the estates were on the outskirts, there was too much expensive travelling. The third objection was to the fact that estates tended to be a long distance from the men's workplaces.<sup>3</sup> These complaints were echoed and re-echoed throughout the 1930's. For example, in 1938 a reporter visited Burnley's housing estates and found "Wanted - cinemas, shops ... sports amenities, and cheap 'bus fares. For Disposal - Undesirable dampness in rooms, jail-like isolation, boredom, high living expenses."<sup>4</sup> He added that everyone he interviewed complained about the high rents.<sup>4</sup>

As the estates increased in size, rent increasingly became a political issue. The proportion of voters living on the estates rose rapidly during the 1930's - no figures were provided as to how many, but a crude estimate may be made on the assumption that there were two voters per council house.

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1. Burnley Express, July 3, 1936, p. 18, col. 2.

2. Luton News, June 29, 1933, p. 11, col. 1.

3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 1, 1931, p. 5, col. 4.

4. Burnley Express, February 12, 1938, p. 14, cols. 3 - 4.

TABLE 5.7:<sup>1</sup> APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF VOTERS IN COUNCIL HOUSES; THESE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL MUNICIPAL ELECTORATE, 1938.

	<u>NUMBER OF VOTERS</u>	<u>ELECTORS 1938</u>	<u>% VOTERS IN COUNCIL HOUSES</u>
BURNLEY	4784	48,063	9.9
HALIFAX	5264	54,471	9.6
IPSWICH	5962	49,326	12.1
LUTON	2176	50,287	4.3

Thus the council house voter had become an important political force by the late 1930's, all the more so as they were concentrated in a comparatively small number of wards. It is impossible to be certain how far Labour growth in these areas was the result of people switching their political views, and how much it was due to a redistribution of Labour voters, but it is interesting that (with the exception of Halifax), wards containing estates of council housing showed a similarity in the mid 1930's in returning Labour councillors where in the 1920's, they had been Conservative or Liberal.

TABLE 5.8: COUNCILLORS RETURNED BY WARDS CONTAINING COUNCIL ESTATES - THE EARLY 1920'S COMPARED TO THE LATE 1930'S.

	<u>WARDS</u>	<u>1920 - 1924</u>	<u>1934 - 1938</u>
BURNLEY	LOWERHOUSE, GANNOW	4 L ; 4C ; 2 LAB	1 C ; 9 LAB
HALIFAX	OVENDEN	2 L ; 3 LAB	3 L ; 2 LAB
IPSWICH	ST.CLEMENTS	1 L ; 7C ; 2 LAB	1L ; 3C; 7 LAB
LUTON	LEAGRAVE <sup>2</sup>	4 IND ; 2C ; 1 LAB	2 IND;4C; 4 LAB

L = LIBERAL; C = CONSERVATIVE; LAB = LABOUR; IND = INDEPENDANT

1. Council houses as in Table 5.5.

Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1938, Tables, Part 11. Civil, Table V.

2. This ward was not incorporated into Luton until 1928, so the years for Luton are 1928 - 1932, and 1934 - 1938.

Consequently, council house rents became a political issue. This was most evident in Burnley, where there was a change of control. Before they gained power, Labour had no problem - they were against all rent increases. Between 1935 and 1938, however, when it was in control, the party ran into serious difficulties. The Labour Housing Chairman eventually decided that rising costs demanded rent increases and introduced a plan for higher rents to the Council,<sup>1</sup> but the Labour majority would not accept this, and the proposal was defeated.<sup>2</sup> The Conservative and Liberal parties claimed that this decision was taken because Labour feared it would cause them to lose the elections,<sup>2</sup> and they kept the issue on the boil all year. The older parties seem to have written off the council house voters as poor prospects for them anyway, and perhaps hoped to appeal to the great majority of voters who lived in non-council property by stressing the relationship between rent and the rates. If the rents were kept down, the rates would have to rise. It is very difficult to say how far Conservative success in the 1938 elections was attributable to this issue, because the elections took place shortly after Chamberlain's visit to Munich, which Conservative leaders in Burnley felt did them a great deal of good.<sup>3</sup> But the swing against Labour was sharper in Burnley than elsewhere (Labour lost six seats, compared to only one apiece in Ipswich and Halifax) - though this may have been the result of a reaction against the Labour controlled Council. It is interesting to note, however, that the one seat Labour retained in Burnley in 1938 was in a ward with a large number of council houses.<sup>3</sup>

In Ipswich and Luton also, Labour was picking up votes in wards with large numbers of council houses. Council rents in both towns

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1. Burnley Express, January 19, 1938, p. 8, col. 3.

2. Ibid., March 5, 1938, p. 16, cols. 1 - 2.

3. Ibid., November 2, 1938, p. 8.

were rather higher than in Burnley and Halifax, but pressure from Labour to lower them was resisted by the older parties. Labour's known attitude to council rents must have been an important factor in contributing to its success in these wards.

Halifax was an exceptional case. The Liberals retained considerable strength in Ovenden, and Labour found it very difficult to dislodge them. The radical tradition of the Liberal party in the town, and the fact that Councillor Pickles, one of the ablest Liberals, was Chairman of the Halifax Housing Committee, who ensured that rents in the town were kept low, worked to the advantage of the Liberal party.

The second main problem concerned with living on the council estates was that of loneliness. When houses were demolished, communities were broken up and dispersed all over the town - in Luton, this was deliberate policy.<sup>1</sup> Housewives, at home alone all day, and with strangers as neighbours, suffered particularly from loneliness. The situation was made more difficult because there were very few facilities available for getting to know people. The councils were slow to permit public houses to be built on the estates, although these were the traditional social centres for many people. In the North, there was considerable Non-Conformist opposition to building new public houses, and Free Churchmen were well represented on both Northern councils and amongst the licensing magistrates. Advocates of building public houses on the estates found it very difficult to get their proposals past both. One attempt in Burnley failed despite the offer of the brewery (Massey's) to give up two central licenses in exchange for one suburban one, and the production of a declaration from the Chief

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1. Luton News, June 29, 1933, p. 11, col. 1.

Constable that a public house on a council estate would be "definitely easier to supervise than a house in a congested area."<sup>1</sup> The brewers produced petitions from estate dwellers, but the Free Churches and the Sunday School Unions were able to counter these with petitions from their own members. Non-Conformists were not in a majority on either Northern council, but they were generally able to rely on support from councillors who were worried that public houses would cause the estate dwellers to get into debt, many of whom were already having difficulty paying their rent.<sup>2</sup>

In Burnley many councillors felt that the estate dwellers had to be protected even from off-licenses. A proposal to allow the opening of one of these in 1936 found the Council evenly divided, and it was only the Mayor's casting vote which gave permission.<sup>3</sup> Such difficulties did not arise in the South. In Ipswich, where the Non-Conformist pressure groups were less influential, and where members of one of the town's leading breweries (Cobbold's) were councillors, the Council permitted the brewery to build public houses as the housing estates reached completion.<sup>4</sup>

Vested interests in the North were able also to prevent other facilities being developed on the housing estates. In Halifax, the Co-operative Society found it very difficult to get permission to open branches there. Shopkeepers already established on these estates successfully petitioned the Council against the Co-operative.<sup>5</sup> Many Conservative and Liberal councillors disliked the Co-operative on political grounds, and in addition they sympathised with the shopkeepers' fear that they would be unable to compete with the lower prices the Co-operatives charged. Finally, although the churches were active in petitioning estate dwellers

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1. Burnley Express, February 12, 1938, p. 18, cols. 1 - 2.

2. E.g. Ibid., May 9, 1936, p. 20, cols. 1 - 2; Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 5, 1939, p. 5, col. 5.

3. Burnley Express, May 9, 1936, p. 20, col. 1.

4. E.g. East Anglian Daily Times, February 4, 1936, p. 5, col. 4.

5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 4, 1937, p. 7, col. 1.

against drinking establishments, it appears that they were very slow in setting up buildings of their own. There were complaints in both Northern towns that people were losing touch with the churches because they had too far to travel to worship.<sup>1</sup>

These factors in combination made many people very reluctant to move onto the housing estates, and provoked many of those who did move there to go back to the districts they had come from as soon as possible. The result was greater overcrowding in central areas, because the housing stock in these districts was being reduced by slum clearance, so that the returning migrants shared houses already occupied.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, despite all these problems, the housing estates represented an enormous improvement in housing standards. Many of the problems were in any case surmounted in time, and the incentive to personal improvement which the new houses provided was very considerable, especially to those people who had moved out of the slums for good.

Slum clearance was the second major activity of councils in the sphere of housing, but it was not till the 1930's that real progress was made in this direction. In the North, from the start of the period, councils had been anxious to clear the slums. In 1919, the Burnley Medical Officer of Health proposed that approximately half the houses to be built during the forthcoming three year programme should replace those "unfit for human habitation"<sup>3</sup>, mainly houses in the "black spots". But in the absence of Government financial assistance<sup>5</sup> for slum demolition, councils preferred to concentrate on building subsidy houses. By 1933 only one of the nine worst areas of housing in Burnley had been cleared.<sup>4</sup> However, in 1930, the Housing Act gave local authorities

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1. E.g. Burnley Express, February 12, 1938, p. 14, col. 4.

2. Ibid., February 5, 1938, p. 14, col. 4.

3. Ibid., October 29, 1919, p. 6, col. 4.

4. Ibid., April 12, 1933, p. 8, col. 2.

a subsidy for slum clearance. The operation of the act was interrupted by the economy campaign from 1931 to 1933, but thereafter the National Government took up slum clearance vigorously, and acts were passed in 1933 and 1935 to promote it. Inevitably, these operated on a much larger scale in the Northern towns, though the acts did have considerable impact in Ipswich. In Halifax the first clearance scheme demolished 1845 houses, and rehoused 5886 people;<sup>1</sup> the second proposed the demolition of a further 2306 houses, with 7829 people to be rehoused.<sup>2</sup> The initial Burnley scheme involved the demolition of 1642 houses, and the displacement of 6240 people; the second, the clearance of a further 1100 houses.<sup>3</sup> In Ipswich, by 1938, the Council had rehoused 982 families from slum clearance areas.<sup>4</sup> Slums were even discovered in Luton, and the 1933 scheme proposed the demolition of 111 houses and the rehousing of 400 people.<sup>5</sup>

Although these schemes involved substantial proportions of the populations of these towns (one eighth of the people in Halifax and Burnley), in both cases the surface of the problem was only touched, and the progress made occurred only slowly. Finance was very limited; the "economisers" kept a close watch for excessive expenditure; and the tenacity of vested interests proved to be very formidable. Something like a running war developed in the North between Medical Officers of Health and councils on the one side, and slum landlords on the other. There was an interesting regional contrast in the way advocates of demolition portrayed the slum landlord. In the North, they were presented in a very unsympathetic light. Dr. Roe of Halifax wrote of his attempts to get landlords to improve their property: "Even the removal of sinks from dark-cellar

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 30, 1939, p. 7, col. 3.

2. Ibid., March 25, 1937, p. 7, col. 3.

3. Burnley Express, September 30, 1933, p. 18, col. 3; January 8, 1938, p. 9, col. 1.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, May 3, 1938, p. 9, col. 4.

5. Luton News, June 29, 1933, p. 11, col. 1.



heads to a position against an external wall where adequate light is available, has met with the most fierce opposition." He added "undue pressure is frequently necessary to get the most urgent sanitary defects remedied."<sup>1</sup> Roe's predecessor, Dr. Banks, found some 20 faults in the property of one landlord, ranging from defective floorboards, roofs and windows, to dangerous house walls. He concluded that "only after the service of Statutory Notices and great delay" were these dealt with.<sup>2</sup>

Medical Officers in Ipswich and Luton were less strict with slum landlords, and opponents of slum clearance schemes were presented sympathetically in Southern newspapers. It appears that in the South, the typical slum landlord was as poor as his tenants, "a man with a small pension"<sup>3</sup>, or "old people who have invested their life savings in a few cottages".<sup>4</sup> The Medical Officer for Ipswich admitted "the obvious injustice" of dispossessing these people but warned that the sympathy shown for them was slowing down the progress of slum clearance.<sup>4</sup>

This contrast in attitudes derived from the nature of the slum clearance problem itself. In the North slums were so numerous and so bad that councils and Medical Officers felt it necessary to portray the vested interests opposing clearance in as unsympathetic a light as possible in order to maximise public support for demolition. In the South, where slums were less of a problem, the authorities felt able to present a kinder (and perhaps fairer) picture of the slum landlord and his problems.

One consequence of the process of clearance in the North was that the extent of the housing problem was increasingly revealed. Northerners were made fully aware just how much work ~~was~~ they had

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1. Halifax, Health Report, 1930, p. 100.

2. Ibid., 1926, p. 30.

3. East Anglian Daily Times, July 23, 1936, p. 5, col. 4.

4. Ipswich, Health Report, 1932, p. 15.

to do, and both councils, at the end of the period, recognised that there was, in the words of Cr. Pickles, the Liberal Chairman of the Halifax Housing Committee, "a responsibility on the Corporation whether they received [sic] grant or not [to] rehouse, and pull down its slums".<sup>1</sup> The crusading spirit of some councillors was becoming aroused by the slum problem, and they used appropriate terminology - slum clearance was an attempt to make Burnley "like the New Jerusalem"; it required a second "five year plan" and a third.<sup>2</sup>

A second point of contrast between North and South - and one which involved also councillors' attitudes to the municipalities participating in business - emerges over the question of direct labour. Both Halifax and Burnley councils whilst under Conservative and Liberal control had decided to build a proportion of their council houses by this method. Halifax had set up a building and painting department in 1920 which operated through-out the period. In Burnley, there was an interesting change in party attitudes to direct labour. This method of building houses had first been introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Council in 1929 as an experiment. A factor prompting some of the majority councillors to support the idea was the knowledge that combinations of builders had been forcing prices up and the belief that direct labour, by offering lower tenders, would bring them down again.<sup>3</sup> It was also hoped that the profits made would go to the relief of the rates.<sup>4</sup>

The victory of the advocates of municipal building was very narrow - a majority of one - and the minority feared that direct labour was the thin end of the wedge. If it were carried to its

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 6, 1938, p. 9, col. 6.
  2. Burnley Express, February 5, 1938, p. 14, cols. 3 - 6.
  3. Ibid., January 8, 1938, p. 9, col. 3.
  4. It was estimated in 1939 that the Works Department had contributed profits of £10,500 to relieve the rates since 1935. Ibid, July 7, 1939, p. 12, col. 3.

logical conclusion, all council houses would be built by the Works Department.<sup>1</sup> These fears were realised when Labour won control of the Council: "The policy of the party in power ... is Direct Labour."<sup>2</sup> Only Works Department tenders were accepted, even when private enterprise offered lower ones.<sup>2</sup> The decision that all houses should be built directly by the Council converted the Conservatives and Liberals to a total commitment to private enterprise. Municipalisation of the building industry, instead of being a policy in line with the active Council intervention in industry that had justified in Conservative and Liberal eyes the take-over of the trams, the gas, and the electricity works, was revealed as "creeping Socialism" and as such had to be opposed root and branch. The older parties responded with an equally doctrinaire commitment to close the Works Department, and when they regained control of the Council, private enterprise tenders were accepted in preference to those of the Works Department.<sup>3</sup> It was the first retreat by the older parties from a century-long tradition of expanding the areas in which the Council could operate.

In this respect, the situation in Burnley was transformed at the very end of the period to resemble that in Ipswich, where there was staunch opposition amongst the older parties to the idea of direct labour. Luton Council never considered this issue; Ipswich Council did, but only to reject the proposal. Twice, motions for the employment of direct labour on a large scale were put to the Council by the Labour party and on each occasion the Conservative-Liberal majority rejected them.<sup>4</sup> They felt the Council had gone far enough in extending its interests into housing by becoming the principal landlord in the borough - their concept of what a municipality should do never extended as far as building the houses themselves.

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1. Burnley Express, December 14, 1929, p. 17.

2. *Ibid.*, January 5, 1935, p. 18.

3. On one occasion, there was only £10 difference between the Works Department tender and that of a private company, though the latter was the lower of the two. *Ibid.*, July 7, 1939, p. 12, col.3.

4. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1935-1936, pp. 251-257; *Ibid.*, 1936-1937, pp. 83-90.

Before concluding this chapter, it is appropriate at this point to add a note about town planning. This question can be dispatched briefly because planning was a peripheral interest of these councils during this period. Ipswich Council came nearest to producing a comprehensive policy in 1930 with the aim of establishing the pattern of development in the town during the next fifty years.<sup>1</sup> But it remained all too easy for the planners to run foul of the Council, as for example, occurred in education. Elaborate plans for school building in the suburbs were disrupted by "economisers" worried about the expense.<sup>2</sup>

Burnley, Halifax and Luton proceeded to develop without plans. For example, in Burnley, it was only after the first slum area had been cleared that councillors began to ask what should be done with the site.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1930's, there were so many of these desolate areas about the town, that councillors complained that Burnley was looking like the bombed areas of Spain.<sup>4</sup> Not till the end of that year did the Council vote to build houses and flats on them. In Halifax, the position was much the same; proposals to build houses on the cleared areas were not considered till 1933.<sup>5</sup> It has already been suggested above that housing estates were built with very little provision for shops, libraries, churches, and even the construction of schools near the estates seems to have had an element of the accidental about it: in Burnley, "the areas which had been chosen to provide school sites had been found to coincide with those in which considerable additions to housing property would take place."<sup>6</sup> The failure to plan in Halifax was revealed during an enquiry into the proposal to build a new civic centre in 1937. A brief extract from the enquiry proceedings illustrates the absence

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1. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1929-1930, pp. 338-347.

2. Details in Chapter 6, p. 224.

3. Burnley Express, December 5, 1928, p. 4, col. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, February 5, 1938, p. 14, col. 3; October 8, 1938, p. 5, col. 4.

5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, December 7, 1933, p. 7, cols. 2-3.

6. Burnley Express, April 14, 1934, p. 6, col. 4.

of planning in the town. The Inspector at the enquiry asked first the Town Clerk why one site had been chosen for new buildings in preference to several others that were available:

Town Clerk: "It was almost impossible for an official or a member of the Council to say definitely why any scheme was knocked out. There might be thousands of reasons, and he submitted that it was not quite fair to ask witness why particular sites were knocked out."

The Inspector then asked to see reports of the engineering, architectural, and town planning advice given to the Council on the advisability of the chosen site.

Town Clerk: "There are no written reports."

Inspector: "Are vital things like this settled without a written report?"

Town Clerk: "Yes, and not at all unusual."<sup>1</sup>

Why were councils so lax in preparing plans? The principal reasons were the expense both of setting up planning departments, and of employing qualified town planners. Both Northern councils experienced difficulty as it was in justifying the salaries paid to existing officials against the attacks of both the Labour party and some economising members of the older parties. It would have been very difficult to justify new appointments even had the case for them been proved - and this was only becoming apparent as the period progressed. The need for planning was less obvious in the North than in the South: the pressures of large population inflows, the necessity to provide new schools, hospitals, houses etc., that forced the Southern councils to prepare advance plans were not operating in the North. Finally, Ipswich Council in particular was spurred

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, February 5, 1937, p. 7.

on to planning by the need to protect its heritage. It was the only one of these towns with any buildings of architectural interest, and the only one that could be considered attractive to tourists, and yet, in the 1920's, several historic buildings in the town were demolished, some to make way for new roads, others for shops or cinemas. A crisis arose when the 18th. century Stoke Hall was pulled down. It was obvious that the old town required protecting, and that there was a danger that it might be destroyed piecemeal. Advance plans were needed to ensure that what was architecturally good in Ipswich survived. A vigilance society was formed under the Presidency of Lord Ullswater<sup>1</sup> and the pressure it brought to bear on the Council was an important factor behind its earlier acceptance of the need for planning.

To conclude: the house building activities of these councils were amongst their major endeavours during this period. Few of their efforts affected as many people so directly. If it be assumed that the number of people occupying each house was four, the proportion of the 1939 population who were living in council houses was 11.2% in Burnley, 11% in Halifax, 12% in Ipswich, though only 4.3% in Luton. The implications for future political developments of the councils becoming landlords of over 10% of the population in three of these towns, were considerable - rent joined rates amongst the factors councils had to decide with great care. If the rents were kept artificially low to please the estate dweller, then the rates would have to rise, which would antagonise the rest of the town. Councillors had to maintain a very difficult balance: Halifax Council pointed one way out of the dilemma - people were encouraged to buy houses by council loans at low interest rates.<sup>2</sup>

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, January 6, 1930, p. 4; January 10, 1930, p. 7, col. 5.

2. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 26, 1936, p. 7.

The housing campaigns of the interwar period narrowed the gap between North and South. New houses everywhere were built according to high standards, and the improvement was especially marked in the North, where council houses contrasted particularly favourably with the average pre-1914 house. But the work still to be done was enormous, not only in the North, but also in the South. A measure of this may be extracted from the Census of 1951, which revealed that 22% of the households<sup>1</sup> in Halifax either shared or did not have a water closet (compared to only 4% in Burnley, and 2% apiece in the other towns<sup>2</sup>); that 52% of households<sup>1</sup> in Burnley either shared baths, or had none at all (compared to 30% in Ipswich, and 24% apiece in the other towns<sup>2</sup>); and that the proportion of houses lacking at least one of the five "essentials" (i.e. Bath, piped water, stove, sink and water closet) was 58% in Burnley, 50% in Halifax, 34% in Ipswich, and 30% in Luton.<sup>2</sup>

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1. In undivided dwellings.

2. Census 1951 England and Wales, Housing Report (1956), Table 13.

CHAPTER SIXEDUCATION

At the start of the interwar period, the pattern of education differed very much from North to South. The origins of the contrast lay in the industrial history of the two regions. In the North, where the pattern before the Great War had been for children to enter industry at an early age, schooling had been continued on a day release or evening class basis. Consequently, technical education was well developed, but secondary education was stunted. In the South, where the apprenticeship system was much less generally established, there was a tendency for children to stay at school longer, especially in Ipswich, where it was encouraged by the large commercial and professional sector, which required staff with some academic training.

The interwar period was to see large changes in this situation, brought about by two factors. The most important of these was the slump, which completely changed the attitude of many Northerners to education. No longer was it regarded as a training for local industry, it was seen increasingly as a means of escape from the consequences of the depression. Grammar School sixth forms grew fast, technical college enrolments stagnated. In the South, the pressures were different. The new technological and scientifically based industries required trained personnel, so pressure was put - not always with great success - on councils to build technical colleges. Because the new growing industries paid comparatively high wages to young people, there was a tendency in the South for more of them to leave school early and enter industry. Consequently Southern grammar schools did not grow very fast in the thirties.

The second factor promoting change was the attitude of the Government, which was increasingly concerned about the contribution

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education could make to Britain's future as an industrial nation, and which consequently endeavoured, at least some of the time, to improve the educational system. The Board of Education was more consistent, wishing to ensure certain standards, and bring about greater uniformity. This involved strengthening the secondary school sector in the North, and the technical sector in the South. Considerable pressure was put on local councils by the Board to remedy defects in their areas - one indication of the independence of the local authorities at this time was that this pressure was often successfully resisted. Many Southern councillors opposed paying more into a non-productive enterprise like education which was already the largest item in the rates. Northern councillors were often divided within themselves in their attitude to education. They despaired of technical education, which had not saved the textile industry from the depression, and they could not see much practical value in the traditional teaching of the grammar schools. There was consequently a strong temptation on their part to stint education, but fortunately it was resisted, partly because most councillors were sufficiently responsible to refuse to squander the Victorian and Edwardian inheritance of social capital, and partly because by about 1933 councils had learned how to manage their finances in a period of depression and were able to devote more money to education. The result in regional terms was that, whereas at the start of the period the South led the North, during the twenties and thirties this difference was progressively reduced till by 1939 the converse was true.

This chapter begins with a note on the impact of industry on education, proceeds to a discussion of secondary schooling, where

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the most interesting regional contrast occurred, examines the elementary and technical sectors, and concludes with a discussion about careers for young people in the four towns.

Before embarking on the discussion, however, it is necessary first to point out one defect in the comparability of the education systems between the North and the South. Luton was a Municipal Borough during this period, sharing its educational responsibilities with Bedfordshire County Council. This affected mainly secondary and technical education, which the two organised jointly. As is sometimes the case where duties are shared, there was a tendency for both parties to shirk their responsibilities.

The influence of industry on Northern education is apparent from two developments in which neither of the Southern towns shared. Firstly, the textile industries employed large numbers of women and to enable as many of them as possible to go to work, classes were provided in elementary schools for very young children. The most beneficial form of education for such small children is the nursery school, and Burnley Council was the only one of these four councils to have set up one of these before 1918.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, the requirements of industry for the training of young people and for research into new techniques encouraged Burnley and Halifax councils to establish technical colleges, both of which had some regional importance. They provided mainly part-time education, in the form of day release and evening classes for young workers in industry - over 1500 in 1922<sup>2</sup> in each town, the majority taking courses in textiles and engineering. Consequently a much larger proportion of the population in the Northern towns had

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1. Annual Report for 1918 of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education, pp. 233-238; 1919 Cmd. 420.
  2. Board of Education, List of the More Important Technical Schools and of the Schools of Art recognised by the Board of Education Under the Regulations for Technical, Etc., Schools, 1922-1923, List 111, Part 1.

had some form of further education than was the case in Luton and Ipswich, where there were no technical colleges to provide a supplement to the more academic type of education offered by the secondary schools. The extensive provision of technical education in Burnley and Halifax was the more impressive when set against the general neglect of such instruction in Britain during the interwar period, which was criticised by one of the Presidents of the Board of Education as "one of the worst examples of waste in all educational history."<sup>1</sup>

Whilst it would be unfair to attribute all educational progress to the influence of industry - spending on special services for children between 1921 and 1924 was over 70% higher per head in the North than the South,<sup>2</sup> and the reason for this difference was clearly a response to the widespread ill-health in the North - it is hard to explain Northern neglect of secondary schooling in any other way than the fact that it competed with local industry. Prospects in the textile industry before the First World War were attractive enough for most parents to prefer to send their children to work rather than to allow them to remain at school. This situation was to change strikingly during the interwar period, but the struggle was a tough one, and its importance merits attention. The attitude to secondary education changed most sharply in Burnley, so it is proposed to examine developments there in detail.

The pattern for the 1920's was set at the start of the decade after the teachers at the town's two grammar schools defeated the Council, forcing them to pay higher salaries.<sup>3</sup> This humiliation at the hands of a tiny group of teachers rankled with many councillors, and made the development of a friendly attitude to

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1. Lord Eustace Percy, President of the Board, 1924-1929. W.H.G. Armytage, Four Hundred Years of English Education (1964), p. 218.

2. "Special Services" comprised medical inspection and treatment, feeding of school children, care of defective children, organisation of physical training, evening play centres and nursery schools. Board of Education, Cost per Child, Elementary Education (England and Wales), L.E.A's Actual Expenditure, 1921-1924, Tables 10, 11.

3. The teachers threatened to resign en masse if they were not paid the Burnham Salary Scale III in place of Scale II. Burnley Express, July 20, 1921, p. 6.

secondary education that much more difficult. Even progressive councillors like Alderman Grey blamed the teachers for the problems of the Burnley education system: rising expenditure was caused by paying "more for our education in the shape of salaries and wages than it ought to cost."<sup>1</sup> The position, according to Grey, was "deplorable".<sup>1</sup> He was not alone in his views. The Editor of the Burnley Express, attacking proposals to raise the school-leaving age to 15, commented "we can well understand why the N.U.T. is so keen on this proposal. For one thing, it will find more posts for teachers at higher rates of salary."<sup>2</sup> Even the Burnley Labour party, in spite of the fact that the party nationally favoured improvements in education, especially at the secondary level, was critical of such development at the local level. One spokesman stated bluntly<sup>3</sup> that "education was not popular with the working-class because it was costing too much." Another expressed a widespread feeling amongst Labour workers in the town, and perhaps therefore amongst the working class as a whole, when he said "well-to-do people ... were using the secondary schools in order to educate their children at a cheap rate. These educational facilities were not provided for the working classes at all. The higher education of working class children was absolutely neglected."<sup>4</sup> It was hard enough for Labour councillors to justify a pay increase of £4 a week for the Grammar School headmaster even in prosperous times, and impossible when this was proposed (and passed)<sup>5</sup> during a period of depression, at a time when very few working class boys were attending his school.

But the onus of blame for this parsimonious attitude to secondary education should not be allowed to rest entirely with

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1. Burnley Express, March 17, 1923, p. 14, col. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, July 13, 1929, p. 9, col. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, March 7, 1925, p. 5, col. 3.

4. Councillor Rippon; Burnley Express, May 5, 1923, p. 5, col. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, March 7, 1925, p. 5.

the Council. The creation of a more amenable view was not facilitated by the characters of the men who were headmasters of the Grammar School during the crucial years after 1926. It is indicative of the stormy relations between school and management that whereas, during the interwar period, Luton Modern School had only two heads, Burnley Grammar School had four. The second of these, A.A.C. Burton, did not display very much tact or ingenuity in his handling of the Council. He was a stickler for conformity in dress, and spent much time ensuring that all boys were correctly attired. In a period when incomes were low, and keeping a boy at grammar school could be an almost crippling financial burden to a working class family, sartorial fanaticism was carried to extremes. It is hardly surprising that Burton came in for attack, not only from the Labour party (he "had found time in the past to send out ridiculous letters about caps and dress and deportment instead of spending his time teaching"<sup>1</sup>) but also from the Liberal Burnley News.<sup>2</sup> This was particularly unfortunate because important issues affecting the Grammar School had to be decided. The buildings were too small and needed replacing. Additional staff were required because of the school's expansion, especially in the sixth form. Instead of campaigning for a new building, however, Burton decided to take the lesser issue first, and he chose to fight - of all posts - for an extra Classics master. There could hardly have been an appointment less "useful"<sup>3</sup> to the town's principal problem, its failing industries. Although only a few hundred pounds were involved there was a fierce fight in the Council on this issue. Burton got his way but ominously, "party standpoints"<sup>4</sup> were abandoned by his opponents, Labour and Conservative councillors united to

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1. Burnley Express, December 8, 1928, p. 18, col. 6.

2. Burnley News, April 23, 1927, p. 9, col. 5.

3. Burnley Express, August 18, 1928, p. 11, col. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, December 8, 1928, p. 18, col. 5.

try to defeat the proposal; and on the much more important issue of a new school, the Council voted against him, though by only one vote.<sup>1</sup> A little more tact, or a better strategy might have secured the new building.

The narrowness of this vote is significant. By this time the forces of antagonism to the grammar school were breaking up - Burton's controversial character was perhaps the principal factor keeping them alive. The reasons for the change of attitude were: firstly, the comparatively favourable financial position of a council whose attitude to education in general had not been unfavourable - its generosity to the special schools has already been noted, and these were supplemented in 1929 by the acquisition of a Summer School near Morecambe for poor children.<sup>2</sup> Secondly - and much more important - was the rapid expansion of demand for places at the Grammar Schools. This phenomenon had been noted as early as 1922, when the Boys' Grammar School experienced a large increase in the number of its pupils.<sup>3</sup> The table below shows the percentage of the population of secondary school age attending the grammar schools. For comparative purposes, figures for the other three towns have been included.

TABLE 6.1A : PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION AGED 10 - 19 IN  
SECONDARY GRAMMAR SCHOOLS.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	4	4	11.5	6
1933	6	6	11	8
1939	11	10	10	6.5

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1. Burnley Express, February 9, 1929, p. 8.

2. Ibid., January 2, 1929, p. 3, col. 5.

3. Ibid., September 9, 1922, p. 5.

TABLE 6.1B : ATTENDANCE AT SECONDARY GRAMMAR SCHOOLS IN TOTAL NUMBERS<sup>1</sup>.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	747	666	1700	633
1933	878	854	1613	857
1939	906	974	1564	965

To some extent, the dramatic rise in the percentage of young people attending secondary schools in Burnley and Halifax may have been a result of the decline in birth rates, and migration of the poor from the North, just as population movements were a factor behind the slight decline in the South. Many of the migrants to the South came from parts of the country where a hostile attitude to secondary education prevailed. Their disinclination to allow children to remain longer at school may have been increased by the financial hardship caused by the move South, which made them even more willing to take advantage of the employment opportunities available in Ipswich and Luton. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of pupils at secondary grammar schools in the North is striking: 150 extra pupils in Burnley by the end of the period, and 300 more in Halifax. The number of young people overall was declining, but this was not used by the authorities as an excuse to reduce the number of secondary school places.

The reason for this growth in the North was the impression that arose during the slump, and which was largely produced by it, that young people's prospects of employment improved the more education they received. Staying on at school was not preferred because the alternative was the dole - jobs were available for

1. Population as in Census, 1921, County Tables, Table 14; Census, 1931, County Tables, Table 14; National Register, 1939, Table II. This last table only included figures for the age groups  $4\frac{3}{4}$  to  $14\frac{3}{4}$ , so to obtain an approximation of the number of people aged 10 to 19 in 1939, the average attendance at elementary schools in 1937-38 has been subtracted from the total population aged  $4\frac{3}{4}$  to  $19\frac{3}{4}$ .

The schools referred to in the lists are Burnley Grammar and High Schools; Halifax Grammar and High Schools, Crossley and Porter Schools; Ipswich School and High School, Ipswich Municipal Secondary Schools; Luton Modern Schools. Board of Education, List of Secondary Schools and Preparatory Schools in England Recognised by the Board of Education as Efficient, 1921-2, List 60, Part 1; 1932-3, Part 1; 1938-9, Part 1.

school leavers for most of the period; the aim was rather to obtain sufficient qualifications to avoid the sort of occupations that became available to the fourteen year old, which were all too often blind-alley jobs. Two decisions of Burnley Education Committee were influenced by the growth of later leaving: the decision to build an annexe to the Grammar School<sup>1</sup>, and the construction of an entirely new High School for girls at a cost of £60,000.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of children receiving financial assistance was also greatly increased as Table 6.2 shows, during the period when the Labour group controlled the Council, and shows how far the "education" of the Labour Party had proceeded by the eve of the Second World War. In the other towns, the change was much slighter - in fact there were decreases in Halifax and Luton in the 1930's, and in view of the alteration in the regulations concerning free places, it is not possible to be certain how far the 12.5% increase in Ipswich represents a real improvement in the situation.

TABLE 6.2 : PERCENTAGE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES FREE (IN 1938, PARTIALLY REMITTED)<sup>3</sup>

	1928	1932	1938
BURNLEY	49.6	47.3	86.5
HALIFAX	45.5	66.0	65.3
IPSWICH	26.3	30.0	42.5
LUTON	36.0	39.0	36.0

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Local authorities' attitudes to education remained very sensitive to economic conditons. The achievement of Burnley and Halifax councils in developing secondary education must be

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1. Burnley Express, April 15, 1933, p. 16, col. 2.

2. Ibid., June 20, 1936, p. 20, col. 3.

3. Board of Education, List 60, 1928-29, Part 1; 1932-33, Part 1; 1938-39, Part 1.



measured against the economising pressures at work in both towns. Even in Halifax, which was more prosperous than Burnley in the 1920's these were very strong, largely because they combined three influential groups in the town. Powerful sections of the Conservative and Liberal parties opposed higher spending on education because of the impact this would have on the rates. Doubts about the relevance of education to the needs of the working class, explains the support many Labour councillors gave to the "economisers".<sup>1</sup> Finally, even usually liberal and progressive forces in the town like The Halifax Courier and Guardian were concerned at the "rather appalling manner" in which "the costs of education are mounting up"<sup>2</sup> and consequently opposed such proposals as raising the school leaving age to fifteen which would "further harass parents"<sup>2</sup>. The success of the "economisers" was fortunately only partial. They were able to stop new initiatives like the one mentioned above, but lost vital support when they tried to introduce actively regressive measures, such as the abolition of maintenance grants for poor children.<sup>3</sup>

But there was no guarantee that economic recovery would produce a more favourable attitude to education. Although it did so in Halifax; in Ipswich and Luton, the 1930's saw local authorities in general becoming increasingly suspicious of new educational projects. As far as the secondary sector was concerned, this hostility first manifested itself either in a decline in the proportion of free places (as in Luton), or in a policy of higher fees (as in Ipswich). This was a period when demand for secondary school places, especially on the part of the working class remained extremely sensitive to cost changes. In the South, where large

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1. E.g. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, July 7, 1921, p. 5, col. 1.
  2. The Halifax Courier and Guardian, April 25, 1925, p. 6, col. 2.
  3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, June 2, 1921, p. 2, col. 6.

numbers of working class children reached the secondary schools from the start of the period, it was the middle-class representatives who were hostile to secondary education, and who grew more so as the period passed. It was the "Middle class people [who] could not afford"<sup>1</sup> increased salaries for secondary school teachers in Ipswich, and it was Conservative and Liberal councillors who led the attack on the expansion of education in the 1930's - with considerable success, as will be shown below. The Labour party argued that these economies would cause "the children of the poorer classes [to] suffer"<sup>2</sup>, and also suggested that a fee increase of nearly £3 cut the number of pupils at the Municipal Secondary School by nearly 20% between 1927 and 1932.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to these regional contrasts in party attitudes to secondary schooling, the parties also showed a surprising tendency - considering the fierceness with which elections were fought - to divide within themselves on issues of education. Decisions were often made by majorities composed of members voting without any reference to party policy. Labour councillors in the North were not united behind the party's official policy which stressed that "secondary education shall be placed within the reach of every child ... who can reach a certain degree of efficiency."<sup>4</sup> In the South, however, Labour parties did support that policy. In addition to splits within parties, there was also a tendency for Aldermen to vote with the "spenders", a possible indication that councillors voting with "economisers" did so with a view to pleasing the electorate.

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, June 24, 1920, p. 4, col. 1.

2. Ibid., June 30, 1932, p. 9, col. 1.

3. Ibid., December 22, 1932, p. 2, col. 3.

4. A.M.Kazamias, Politics, Society and Secondary Education in England (1966), p. 254.

TABLE 6.3 : DIVISIONS WITHIN PARTIES ON EDUCATIONAL PROPOSALSA) BURNLEYi) MAY<sup>1</sup>1923: PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE SALARIES OF THE PRINCIPALS OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

FOR: 7 LIBERALS, 5 CONSERVATIVES; 6 ALDERMEN ( 3 CONSERVATIVE, 3 LIBERAL).

AGAINST: 5 LIBERALS, 11 CONSERVATIVES, 5 LABOUR; 1 (CONSERVATIVE) ALDERMAN.

ii) JANUARY 1929<sup>2</sup>: APPOINTMENT OF A CLASSICS MASTER AT THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

FOR: 19 LIBERALS, 7 CONSERVATIVES, 1 LABOUR; 7 ALDERMEN ( 5 CONSERVATIVE, 2 LIBERALS).

AGAINST: 5 CONSERVATIVES, 9 LABOUR; 1 (CONSERVATIVE) ALDERMAN.

iii) FEBRUARY 1929<sup>3</sup>: CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

FOR: 11 LIBERALS, 7 CONSERVATIVES, 2 LABOUR; 5 ALDERMEN ( 1 LABOUR, 3 CONSERVATIVES, 1 LIBERAL.

AGAINST: 6 LIBERALS, 7 CONSERVATIVES, 8 LABOUR; 2 ALDERMEN ( 1 LIBERAL, 1 CONSERVATIVE).

After 1929, the attitude of all parties in Burnley, but most markedly, that of Labour, changed towards secondary education. The position was broadly similar in Halifax: when matters concerning education there were debated in the Council, all three parties tended to split.

1. Burnley Express, May 5, 1923, p. 5.
2. Ibid., January 5, 1929, p. 9.
3. Ibid., February 9, 1929, p. 9.

TABLE 6.3B : HALIFAXi) APRIL 1928: NEW BUILDING FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL (SPEAKERS ONLY).<sup>1</sup>

FOR: 1 CONSERVATIVE, 2 LIBERALS, 1 LABOUR.

AGAINST: 1 LIBERAL, 2 LABOUR.

ii) MARCH 1929: NEW HIGH SCHOOL (SPEAKERS ONLY).<sup>2</sup>

FOR: 1 CONSERVATIVE, 3 LIBERALS, 2 LABOUR.

AGAINST: 2 CONSERVATIVES, 1 LIBERAL.

The Labour Party in Ipswich in the 1920's was much more consistent than its Northern counterparts, its "aim and object [being] free secondary education."<sup>3</sup> Conservatives and Liberals, however, despite their elaborate arrangements for offering a united front at elections, divided as readily amongst themselves as their counterparts in Burnley and Halifax.

TABLE 6.3C: IPSWICH.i) FEBRUARY 1920: EXEMPTION OF CHILDREN UNDER 14 FROM WORK (SPEAKERS ONLY).<sup>4</sup>

FOR: 2 CONSERVATIVES, 5 LABOUR.

AGAINST: 2 CONSERVATIVES, 2 LIBERALS.

ii) MAY 1929: EXPENSIVE EDUCATIONAL REORGANISATION (SPEAKERS ONLY).<sup>5</sup>

FOR: 2 LIBERALS, 2 CONSERVATIVES, 2 LABOUR.

AGAINST: 1 LIBERAL, 1 CONSERVATIVE.

iii) MAY 1930: NEW EXPENDITURE ON SCHOOLS (SPEAKERS ONLY).<sup>6</sup>

FOR: 1 CONSERVATIVE, 1 LIBERAL, 1 LABOUR.

AGAINST: 3 CONSERVATIVES, 1 LIBERAL.

1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 5, 1928, p. 5, cols. 4-5.

2. Ibid., March 7, 1929, p. 5.

3. East Anglian Daily Times, March 11, 1926, p. 4, col. 1.

4. Ibid., February 12, 1920, p. 6, cols. 4-5.

5. Ibid., May 9, 1929, p. 5.

6. Ibid., May 15, 1930, p. 4.

The growing consistency of Labour parties was almost certainly a consequence of the appreciation in the North after 1930 of how many working-class children were coming to benefit from secondary education, but a second factor may have been pressure exerted by Labour headquarters to bring local parties into line with the official policy of the party.

The major sphere of education at this time, in terms of the resources allocated to it was the elementary sector. It also provided a sharp regional contrast, with the North inheriting several advantages at the start of the period, and more than maintaining them to the end.

The ratio of qualified staff to pupils was more favourable in the North than in the South, and there was less reliance in Burnley and Halifax on unqualified teachers.<sup>1</sup> The proportion of pupils in old fashioned schools (defined as those built for the supervision of pupil teachers by teachers) was lower in the North than the South, varying from 10% in Halifax and 17.7% in Burnley to 25.1% in Luton and 26.8% in Ipswich.<sup>2</sup> More money was spent per child in the North: an average of the three years 1921 - 1924 shows that spending per child in Halifax was £14.12s, compared to £11.0s.7d in Burnley, £10.6s. in Ipswich, and £9.17s.5d in Luton.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the local authorities' attention in the 1920's had been focussed on the secondary schools - though hardly in the sense suggested by G.A.N.Lowndes.<sup>4</sup> However, by about 1930, a

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1.	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
Staff with certificates per 1000 pupils:	24.1	29.1	21.9	20.3
Staff without certificates per " " :	4.2	2.0	7.5	9.0

Board of Education, Statistics of Public Education for the Year 1922-1923, Table 39.

2. Board of Education. Elementary Schools. Return, 1925 (20); 1924-25, pp. 779 - 799.

3. Board of Education, Cost per Child, List 43, 1921-1924, Tables 10,11.

4. He wrote of this period that "the local education authorities, contemplating the ravages of the Great War, set about modernising and adding to the number of their grammar and county schools." G.A.N.Lowndes, The Silent Social Revolution. An Account of the Expansion of Public Education in England and Wales 1895-1935 (1937), pp. 114-5.

combination of circumstances brought elementary education into the forefront. The Hadow Report recommended a widespread reorganisation of elementary schooling, and on top of this, in the South, came the problems brought by migration and rapid suburban growth. All towns suffered from the phenomenon of declining town centres, with attendances at central schools falling so that resources of staff and equipment were locked up in schools with low attendances, but in the South, this was combined with soaring child populations in the suburbs. Overall, the change in the number of children was not great: between 1924-25 and 1934-35 there was a rise of 15% in Luton, and 7% in Ipswich;<sup>1</sup> however, these figures disguise the sharp changes that took place in various parts of towns, for example, the South Eastern division of Ipswich had 2½% of the town's elementary school population in 1919, but approaching 45% in 1937.<sup>2</sup>

The Southern councils were never during this period able to keep pace with these changes. No sooner had they opened one school than they were obliged to consider plans for another. Even in Ipswich, where suburban population growth was much less dramatic than in Luton, the Council passed a scheme for three new schools in 1935<sup>3</sup> and yet had to examine plans for six more in 1937.<sup>4</sup> By this time the pace was growing too fast for most councillors, and the arguments of the 'economisers' were listened to with much more respect than they had been in the 1920's. During 1938-39, the 'economisers' succeeded in persuading the Council to shelve its schoolbuilding programme, although only two schools had been completed.<sup>5</sup> Luton 'economisers' were also concerned at the rapid rise of the education budget, and they succeeded in reducing the estimates in both 1937 and 1938.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Board of Education, Cost per Child, List 43, 1924-1935, Tables 8, 10.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, April 1, 1937, p. 5, col. 2.

3. *Ibid.*, February 14, 1935, p. 5; March 7, 1935, p. 2, col. 5; March 28, 1935, p. 9, col. 2.

4. *Ibid.*, April 1, 1937, p. 5, col. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, June 22, 1939, p. 5, cols. 2-3; Ipswich, Proceedings, 1937-38, pp. 252-255.

6. Luton News, March 17, 1938, p. 15.

The consequence was inevitably a deterioration in the quality of elementary education in the South. The activities of the "economisers" had followed a period during which the Government itself had enforced restrictions on the expansion of education - new school building was stringently restricted until 1935, adding to the backlog of such building in Luton and Ipswich, and delaying it in effect to a period when prices of land and materials were relatively high. Consequently, elementary school building absorbed a disproportionate amount of the money that councils intended to devote to education, and prevented them (or gave them an excuse), not to pay more than perfunctory attention to the requirements of other branches of education. Indeed, it appears that the pace of educational spending was growing so fast that it provoked a wholesale attack on new developments (including those unlikely to cost much money) even in the usually progressive Council of Ipswich. The introduction of co-education into the secondary schools, the starting of special classes for the educationally sub-normal, a proposal that a teacher be invited to join the Education Committee, were all defeated, as well as those which would prove expensive, such as the establishment of nursery schools, and the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen.<sup>1</sup>

The result was that the gap between the two regions widened, a trend exacerbated by the application of more funds to elementary education in the North, combined with a decline in the number of children there. Between 1931-32 and 1937-38, the amount of money spent per child rose by 47% in Burnley, 17% in Ipswich, and 14% in Halifax and Luton.<sup>2</sup> The totals remained appreciably higher in the North: in 1937-38, Halifax Council spent almost £3. more

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, March 7, 1935, p. 2, col. 5; June 20, 1935, p. 5, col. 3.

2. ANNUAL EXPENDITURE PER CHILD

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1931-1932	243s.1d	288s.11d	230s.7d	224s.10d
1937-1938	359s.	329s	271s.5d	257s.9d

Board of Education, Cost per Child, List 43, 1933, Table 10; 1938, Table 8.

per child than did Ipswich Council. The ratio of teachers to pupils improved, a process assisted by the closure of central schools, but the regional gap remained: by 1937, Halifax had eight and Burnley six more teachers for every thousand pupils than Ipswich and Luton.<sup>1</sup> This permitted the elimination of large classes, thereby securing more individual attention for children. By 1937-38, classes with 50 or more pupils had virtually vanished from the North, whilst only one-third of classes in Burnley and Halifax had over 40 pupils, compared to approximately half in Ipswich and Luton.<sup>2</sup>

The most serious casualty of the "economisers" campaigns in the South was technical education. The interwar years were not a favourable period for this type of teaching for there was much uncertainty in the North about the benefits it conferred, clearly deriving from the fact that an advanced and widely spread technical instruction had not saved important industries such as textiles and engineering from the slump. It is interesting that attitudes in the North to technical education followed the cyclical pattern of the depression: growing dissatisfaction in the 1920's which reached a peak about 1933, was followed by a recovery of confidence as the revival from the depression proceeded.

The popularity of technical education was almost a tradition in the North: even in the late 1920's, the proportion of people pursuing some form of further education was over double that in the South, varying from 55.5 per thousand in Burnley, to 38.8 in Halifax, 17.6 in Ipswich, and 10.7 in Bedfordshire.<sup>3</sup> Most of the

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1. NUMBER OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS PER 1000 PUPILS 1937.

BURNLEY 30.9; HALIFAX 32.3; IPSWICH 24.2; LUTON 24.1

Board of Education, Public Elementary Schools in England and Wales, List 46, 1936-1937, Part B.

2. PERCENTAGE OF CLASSES WITH 40 OR MORE PUPILS, 1937-38.

40 - 49: BURNLEY 27%; HALIFAX 32%; IPSWICH 62%; LUTON 48%  
 OVER 50: " 0.4%; " 0.4%; " 3.8% " 9.1%.

Board of Education, Size of Classes in Public Elementary Schools in England and Wales, 31st. March 1938, List 44, 1938, Part B.

3. Board of Education, England and Wales, Schools and Classes recognised under the Regulations for Further Education, 1927-1928, List 113, 1927-28, Part B.



Northerners studied engineering and textiles, although courses were developed in such subjects as mining, accountancy and commerce (Burnley), and in accounting, banking, commercial law, and languages (Halifax).<sup>1</sup> Both colleges endeavoured to broaden their curricula in response to the problems created by the depression: for example, Burnley Textile Department and the School of Art co-operated in producing fancy textiles in the hope that this would stimulate manufacturers to diversify their production,<sup>2</sup> but in fact such attempts did not save the cotton industry from depression, and there was a growing tendency in both the Council and the town to question the value of further education. For example, one Labour councillor questioned the point of educating weavers, miners, and engineers because, he claimed, even with certificates, they could not get work.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, such criticisms did not sway a majority on either Northern council, and one of the first schemes considered by Burnley Council after the restrictions on building were removed in 1935 proposed extensions to the Municipal College.<sup>3</sup> Most councillors in both Northern towns believed that improved technical education was essential if the North "was going to progress as an industrial area."<sup>4</sup> This conviction was sufficiently strong in Halifax for even former economisers to support a scheme to spend £150,000 extending the Technical College. One of the most prominent of these in the 1920's had so far changed his mind by 1939 that he demanded "was there a man who was going to quibble ... and deprive some poor student of the best technical education possible? He was going to say that in his own case, as a businessman, he would willingly pay the extra 10s. which it would cost him."<sup>4</sup> This change of attitude

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1. Board of Education, List 111, 1922-23, Part 1; 1935, Part 1.

2. Burnley Express, April 8, 1922, p. 16, col. 1.

3. Ibid., January 26, 1935, p. 9, col. 5.

4. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 5, 1939, p. 5.

5. Burnley Express, May 24, 1930, p. 6.

on the part of local industry and business since the 1920's probably reflects two changes in the circumstances of the middle and late 1930's. Firstly there was a general impression that the technical colleges had contributed to both towns' recovery from the depression. Secondly there was a <sup>g</sup>rowing conviction, strengthened by bitterness about the Government's neglect of Northern problems during the depression, that both councils knew what was best for their localities. Their encouragement of junior technical schools was one illustration of this. They were not deterred from building such schools by the fact that "the Board still continued to look upon the junior technical school as a poor relation"<sup>1</sup> and put restrictions on both enrollment and the subjects they could teach.

Whereas recovery in the North stimulated new developments in technical education, in the South it stifled them. It seems that many Southerners had so taken to heart the lessons they believed the depression in the North had taught that they feared to do anything that might imperil prosperity - such as raising the rates in order to build new technical institutes.

In Ipswich, there was a College of Art, and some evening instruction was available from the early twenties, but its provision was unsystematic and piecemeal, and much of the teaching was on a very low level.<sup>2</sup> A Technical College, which contained laboratories and equipment, would raise standards by enabling the introduction of advanced day as well as evening classes. A scheme for such a college was eventually drawn up, after considerable pressure had been brought to bear on the Council by the Board of Education which made its view public, that it was "anomalous

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1. S.J.Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain (1948), p. 504.

2. Board of Education, List 111, 1922-23, Part 111; East Anglian Daily Times, December 20, 1923, p. 2, col. 2.

that Ipswich, in spite of its importance as one of the chief centres of the Eastern Counties ... should possess no Technical College".<sup>1</sup> The economisers defeated the proposal, stressing the cost (though at £150,000, the College would have cost no more than the extensions to Halifax Technical College). It may have been that the root factor was that there was no popular demand for a Technical College in Ipswich, as there was in the North, where so many more people had had personal experience of it. Only 11 councillors voted for the scheme, whilst 27 were opposed.<sup>2</sup> The economisers were assisted by the clumsiness of their opponents, who put the scheme before the Council only five weeks before the municipal elections so that Conservative and Liberal economisers were able to terrify their colleagues and the electorate with prophecies of an additional sevenpence on the rates.<sup>2</sup> No Technical College was set up in Ipswich during the interwar period.

Nor was one built in Luton, though almost twenty years passed after the deficiencies in technical instruction had first been pointed out. In January 1920, an Advisory Committee on Engineering Education presented a report to the Chamber of Commerce recommending immediate action to improve it.<sup>3</sup> They wanted the establishment of a junior technical school for 200 boys, which would eventually be expanded to provide education up to degree level, and insisted that owing to the urgency of the matter, temporary premises should be acquired as soon as possible.

The reasons for the delay were again fears about the cost. The fault was by no means entirely Luton Council's because the responsibility for technical education was shared with Bedfordshire County Council, and where there is such a division, it is

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, February 18, 1936, p. 9, cols. 1-2.

2. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1935-36, pp. 356-362.

3. Luton Chamber of Commerce Journal, January 1920, p. 20; February 1920, p. 43.

extremely difficult to get action taken. On the other hand, if Luton Council had been really determined to set up a technical college, it could have brought sufficient pressure to bear on its partner, as it did when it persuaded the County Council to replace the army huts in which the girls' grammar school was housed.<sup>1</sup> It was probably inevitable that there should be a time-lag between scientific or industrial innovation, and instruction in colleges and schools, but it is an indication of failure to meet the needs of the times that during the interwar period, Luton Council should not have inaugurated courses in motor vehicle engineering, or Ipswich Council courses in agricultural science and engineering.

Before concluding this chapter, one aspect of public education - the libraries - remains to be considered. The interwar period saw a remarkable change, in regional terms, in the facilities available and the use made of them: although in the early 1920's, there was no great contrast in either, by the late 1930's, the Northern towns had gained a marked superiority. It is probable that the depression played a major part in this change.

TABLE 6.4A: PUBLIC LIBRARIES - NUMBER OF VOLUMES IN STOCK PER THOUSAND POPULATION.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1923-24	263.5	858.5	550.5	281.5
1931-2	625	1253	828	382
1937	785	1320	718	508

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1. Luton News, December 15, 1927, p. 8.

TABLE 6.4B: PUBLIC LIBRARIES - NUMBER OF BOOKS BORROWED PER PERSON DURING THE YEAR.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1923-24	2.7	4.6	2.2 <sup>2</sup>	2.8
1931-32	9.6	7.8	7.4	4.6
1937	16.4	7.2	4.7	4.0

The increase in the number of books each person borrowed in Burnley is particularly striking, as is the gap which had developed between North and South by 1937. Depression and unemployment must have forced many people to find additional ways of occupying their time, and have led them to make greater use of the public libraries. Book borrowing rose sharply in Burnley and Halifax between 1923-24 and 1931-32, a period of under-employment and short time working. Conversely, full employment reduced book borrowing and may explain the falls in Halifax, Ipswich, and Luton between 1931-32 and 1937. The increase in the number of volumes in stock everywhere, but most notably in Burnley, shows that councils resisted the temptation to economise on what might have appeared to some members to be a luxury service. In fact improvement went ahead steadily throughout the period, both Northern councils inaugurating experimental services (e.g. book loans to schools)<sup>3</sup> and Burnley Council building a new Central Library in 1930.<sup>4</sup>

1. J.M.Mitchell, The Public Library System of Great Britain and Ireland 1921-23. A Report (1924), Appendices.

Public Libraries Committee, Report on Public Libraries in England and Wales, 1927, Table LXIII, 1927, Cmd. 2868.

Board of Education, Statistics of Urban Public Libraries in England and Wales (1931-2), pp. 8 - 39.

The Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries Year Book 1937, pp. 296 - 323.

2. The statistics for Ipswich in 1923-4 are incomplete because the library was being reorganised.

3. Public Libraries Committee, Statistics of Urban Public Libraries, pp. 8 - 39.

4. Burnley Express, July 2, 1930, p. 2.

Increased book borrowing may have been a factor both stimulating and reflecting the public's desire for education, though in the absence of breakdowns in the type of books borrowed, it is not possible to be certain about this.

The argument of this chapter has been that education in the North was developed and improved faster than in the South, to the extent that by 1939 most of the Northern towns' facilities were superior. One test for the effectiveness of such improvements is the employment opportunities they afforded to the young people they trained. However, this test cannot fairly be applied to a depressed region, for no amount of fine education could create openings in industries suffering from a slump. What local authorities could do, however, was to ensure through the local youth employment agencies, that such opportunities as existed were fully utilised, and that employers realised the quality of the young people who were coming onto the job market. There were several signs that they did so, especially in the North, where youth employment offices were not surprisingly very active. The quality of local government in the North, which was certainly superior to that in the South, may have benefited from the comparatively highly trained personnel it was able to recruit from the grammar schools. The same may have been true of the well established and prosperous financial institutions in the Northern towns such as the Halifax and Burnley Building Societies, though there is no way of measuring this. Finally, the success of the growth industries in the North, may in part have been a consequence of the high quality of technical instruction in both towns.

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Before considering the work of the Youth Employment Officers, it is proposed to examine the effectiveness of the various educational systems in qualifying young people for University. It would have been useful at this point to enquire into the facilities available in the four towns in the form of maintenance grants for University students. However, it appears that records have not been preserved about grants and scholarships except in Burnley, so it is not possible to make a comparative survey. The Board of Education did not keep such information and individual education offices have not preserved records from before the Second World War. Burnley, in any case, may have been exceptional. A local entrepreneur bequeathed an estate of £110,000 to the Council, the annual income from which financed 11 University and further education scholarships valued at between £60 and £150 each a year. The Council claimed<sup>1</sup> this was five times better than the general average for the whole country but in the absence of detailed information, there is no way of testing how far the position in Burnley differed from that in the other three towns.

Information - of rather poor quality - is available for the numbers of young people qualifying for University. It has two principal defects: the Board of Education collected statistics on only two occasions during the interwar period, and analysed them differently each time, on the first calculating the percentage "known to have proceeded direct to a University or a University Training Department"<sup>2</sup>; on the second, the percentage "who had obtained the Higher Certificate."<sup>3</sup>

The latter students may not have entered a University, and

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1. Burnley Corporation, Burnley and Its Industrial Facilities (1935), pp. 39 - 40.
  2. Board of Education, List 62, 1927-28, Table B.
  3. Ibid., List 62, 1936-37, Table B.

consequently it is not possible to state firmly whether there was a change in the numbers going on to University from these four towns. The tables do indicate that considerable improvement occurred in the North in the number of young people acquiring advanced qualifications, whereas in the South, there was a slight decline. The unusually low figure for Ipswich boys in 1936-37 may have been freakish, but there is no other information to check against this. The improvement in the North confirms the conclusion drawn from the rise in the number of secondary school pupils: that the depression produced an increased desire for further education. Considering that the general levels of wealth in the North did not rise very much during this period, and yet the percentage obtaining advanced qualifications did, it may have been that local authority financial provision explains the difference, though in the absence of statistics for Halifax on grants, this conclusion must remain very tentative.

TABLE 6.5: PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS KNOWN TO HAVE GONE TO UNIVERSITY<sup>1</sup> (1924-25 TO 1927-28); PERCENTAGE OBTAINING THE HIGHER CERTIFICATE (1936-37).

<u>A) BOYS</u>	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>BEDFORDSHIRE</u>
1924-5 to 1927-8	6.7	3.7	6.2	8.6
1936-37	9.1	9.3	2.2	7.3
<u>B) GIRLS</u>				
1924-5 to 1927-8	2.8	3.0	3.4	4.6
1936-37	4.1	4.4	3.2	3.7

1. Board of Education, List 62, 1927-28, Part B; List 62, 1936-37, Part B.



The problem of finding employment for school leavers only became a serious one in Burnley. Elsewhere, they were able to obtain work comparatively easily, and they did not swell the unemployment statistics to any large extent. Nonetheless, in all four towns, many of the jobs they took were blind-alley occupations, in Luton and Ipswich as in Burnley and Halifax. Indeed, in prosperous times, the long term possibilities for the young had been rather better in the North than in the South. Clearly recognised lines of entry and promotion were available in the textile and engineering industries. In the early twenties, it was seriously suggested by Burnley Juvenile Employment Sub-committee in a publication addressed to school leavers that entrants to the cotton industry had some chance of rising to mill manager, or even millowner.<sup>1</sup> Such possibilities did not exist in the large, often foreign-owned industries of Luton and Ipswich, with the solitary exception of the hat trade, itself in depression for much of the period. One of the developments which occurred during the interwar years was the decay of the few remaining industries which offered a genuine opportunity to ordinary workmen to rise to the top. Growing awareness that such few avenues to management as remained were being shut off may have contributed to the rise of the Labour movement at this time, particularly as the industries - cotton, wool, hats - which had once offered the best opportunities, were now those in the greatest difficulties. Workers increasingly advised their children against entering them. Though the cotton industry continued throughout the period to offer large numbers of vacancies for young people to learn the trade, by 1938 Burnley Juvenile

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1. Burnley Education Committee, Juvenile Employment, p. 1.

Advisory Sub-committee reported that "employers who at one time were besieged by school-leavers have found great difficulty in obtaining even a minimum supply."<sup>1</sup> The reason for the decline in interest was that "adult workers in the industry are more and more loath to bring in young relatives."<sup>1</sup> Young people were able to reject the cotton industry in this way because a wide variety of alternative occupations existed and an efficient juvenile advisory office was actively making them aware of them. This had not always been the case. Eleven years earlier, the Juvenile Employment Committee discovered that more than 4,500 young people were drawing the dole.<sup>2</sup> This was alarming enough, but during the early 1930's, widespread juvenile unemployment was accompanied by a 100% rise in the juvenile crime rate in just two years.<sup>3</sup> The risk to social peace of the presence in the town of large numbers of bored young people without any visible future, over and above the tragic waste of unemployment, spurred the local authority into action. During 1936, the average number of wholly unemployed juveniles had fallen to 45, and the temporarily stopped numbered 54.<sup>4</sup> This change was brought about by two factors. The activities of the Youth Employment Officers undoubtedly helped, but only in directing the Council's attention to the problem, and the children's attention to the vacancies available. It was the Council's New Industries Programme that absorbed juvenile unemployment. In 1938, the industries most popular with the young were the construction of domestic boilers, and the manufacture of clothing, shoes, and handbags.<sup>5</sup> Such industries took on young people partly because they were easy to train, and partly because they could pay them low wages. They were expanding

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1. Burnley Express, February 16, 1938, p. 5, col. 4.

2. Ibid., January 15, 1927, p. 9, col. 6.

3. Ibid., June 9, 1934, p. 20.

4. Ibid., February 17, 1937, p. 5, col. 1.

5. Ibid., February 16, 1938, p. 5, cols. 4 - 5.

very rapidly: total employment in the age groups 14 to 17 in these three industries rose in only one year from 732 to 943 (1936-37)<sup>1</sup>. There were two consequences to this: unemployment in the older age groups was not greatly reduced, and the result was that in many families, the young employed were supporting the old unemployed, a miserable situation for both groups. The fact that by 1937 there were more vacancies than young people<sup>2</sup> enabled the young to demonstrate their preferences. Their rejection of cotton has already been mentioned; to it was added dislike of domestic work (the reluctance of girls to do this was so strong that the local training centre for the purpose had been closed down).<sup>3</sup> Girls in Burnley had grown accustomed to factory work over the generations, and were reluctant to exchange the independence, companionship, and memory of the comparatively high wages it had offered for the loneliness, long hours, and humiliations of domestic service. Nor was there much financial inducement - the dole paid almost as well as domestic work.

The result of the combination of the efforts of Burnley Juvenile Committee and the New Industries Programme was that unemployment amongst juveniles fell to Southern levels, in the late 1930's. In the other three towns, unemployment amongst the young did not rise to serious proportions. Nevertheless social problems existed, especially in the form of blind-alley occupations. Even in prosperous Luton, many of the jobs available to the young were in this category. The most rapidly expanding sector, the new engineering industries, placed less and less value on skill, as a result of increased mechanisation and the introduction of production-line techniques. The 1930's boom saw"no marked

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1. Burnley Express, February 16, 1938, p. 5, cols. 4-5.

2. Ibid., October 2, 1937, p. 9, col. 5.

3. Ibid., July 14, 1937, p. 8, col. 4.

increase in the number of apprenticeships available"<sup>1</sup>, and most vacancies tended to be on the assembly lines, which although they paid well, offered little possibility of promotion or of building up knowledge of a trade. At the same time, the staple trade of Luton, which had once offered both these opportunities, was in depression with the result that "in recent years juveniles have shown an increased disinclination to enter the hat industry."<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the period there was no serious youth unemployment in any of the four towns, a considerable achievement when set in the general context of the England of the late 1930's. However, the figures hide an enormous amount of waste - it is impossible to state how much in the absence of detailed information - as young people drifted into dead-end jobs. Although the situation improved rapidly for the brighter children, especially in the North, for the rest their education had little relevance to the type of work they took up when they left school. The proportion benefiting from advanced education - though increasing - remained pitifully small, and the weight of the disadvantage, despite improvements, lay against the children of working class parents. Very little pioneering was done, the improvements that occurred were in the traditional methods of education, and innovations were extremely limited. In the four towns there had been only one nursery school in 1919; there was only one in 1939. Neither Ipswich nor Luton Council built a technical college. The school leaving age was nowhere raised above 14.

Behind these failures lay the slump, afflicting not only the good intentions of depressed towns, but creating fears about the

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1. Luton News, February 10, 1938, p. 5, col. 4.

2. Ibid., February 18, 1937, p. 3, col. 5.

consequences of innovations in prosperous ones. Much more than in public health and housing did the depression slow down progress in education. There were two reasons for this - firstly education was rapidly becoming the most expensive item in a council's budget, and secondly, too many councillors saw it as a luxury, as being of doubtful use to industry, with the consequence that it was invariably the first to suffer from the attacks of the economisers. The fact that in the North education progressed as far as it did was because management of the finances there was so much more skilful than in the South, and because the underlying financial situation was basically sound.

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CHAPTER SEVENTHE FINANCING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This chapter seeks to explain why a regional gap in the financing of local government was so slow in appearing. As rates provided most of local authorities' finances, and as industries were more buoyant in the South, it might have been expected that a similar gap would have developed in the expenditure of local authorities on the principal services as appeared in economic growth rates, with the Northern towns lagging behind the Southern. In fact this was not the case. During the period, the Northern towns were able to keep up with the Southern in the resources they allocated to the various departments.

Burnley and Halifax councils were able to do this because firstly the sums they raised from the ratepayers were not very much less than those obtained by Luton and Ipswich councils. The deratings of industry deprived the Southern towns of a source of finance that would otherwise have grown very fast. They were obliged to rely on the small ratepayers, many of whom were as poor in the South as in the North. Southern councils had consequently to be as careful about the extent to which they increased the rates as the Northern ones. Secondly, to compensate for the loss of industrial rates the Government intervened increasingly during this period by giving grants to finance local government, which had the effect of evening up the disparity between ~~some~~ districts.

Thirdly, the potential differences between North and South were lessened because both were open to very much the same influences

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at this time. Luton and Ipswich councils were as much impressed by demands for economy as were Burnley and Halifax, and possibly even more so, because towns in depression have some knowledge of the extent of its effects, especially if the depression has lasted several years, whereas towns fearing depression are likely to over-react in taking action which they believe will mitigate its effects. It was one of the misfortunes of the period that council policies, with the interesting exception of Burnley in the mid-thirties, were ineffective in countering depression because they cut spending when the depression deepened, instead of increasing it, though in defence of them it must be said that this was also the Government's policy.

Fourthly, Northern management of finance was abler, partly because the Northern councils had more powerful finance committees, and partly because the pressure of depression forced them to budget carefully.

Finally, population movements brought a much greater amount of pressure to bear on the Southern councils than they did on the Northern ones, as the poor and the unemployed left the depressed areas to seek work in the prosperous ones. The Southern councils had to provide new services for migrants and for the expanding suburbs on a much larger scale than was the case in the North. The advantage the Northern councils obtained here was, however, reduced to some extent by the obligation to support substantial numbers of the unemployed.

In this chapter, the sources of local authority finance, and the changes that took place in the contribution each of these made, will be considered first, followed by a comparison of the areas in

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which expenditure between the two regions differed - that is in poor relief, highways, and the police. The similarities between North and South, both in their attitudes to finance, and in the ways in which they allocated their resources will be treated next, and in conclusion there will be a discussion of the methods the Northerners used to maintain expenditure on a level with the South in terms of the committee structure, and in the year to year management of finance.

The principal source of municipal income at this time was the rates, and in terms of rateable value per head of population there was no marked regional contrast, though by the late 1930's Luton was growing wealthier in terms of rateable value than the other towns.

TABLE 7.1: RATEABLE VALUE PER HEAD OF THE POPULATION, 1922 - 1936.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1922	£4.10s.2d	£5.3s.7d	£5.12s	£4.18s.
1936	£6.6s.4d	£6.	£6.4s.7d	£6.19s.2d.

When expressed in terms of the product of a penny rate, Luton's advantage is particularly striking:

TABLE 7.2: PRODUCT OF A PENNY RATE.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u> <sup>3</sup>
1922-23	£1749	£1820	£1788	£1107
1936-37	£2071	£2281	£2297	£2600

1. Populations: Census 1921; Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1937.  
Ministry of Health, Comparative Local Financial Statistics, Part II. Annual Local Taxation Returns, England and Wales, 1922-23,  
Table I. Ministry of Health, Local Government Financial Statistics, 1936-37, Part II, Table I.
2. Ibid., 1922-23, Table I; 1936-37, Table I.
3. Luton News, April 8, 1937, p. 11, col. 8.  
Ibid., April 6, 1922, p. 9, col. 5. The figure for 1922-23 refers to the product of a penny rate for the Borough Fund. A penny rate for the General District Fund raised £1080.



This gap would probably have developed sooner, and would have become much wider, had industry not been derated. It is impossible to calculate exactly how much the Southern towns lost by the deratings, but an indication can be obtained from some information published in the Luton News.<sup>1</sup> This shows that before the derating of 1929, there were 18 firms in Luton with a rateable value of £1000 and more providing an income for the Council at the 1929 rate, of £18,500. After derating the income from them dropped to a third of its previous level (to £5,500). Most of these companies were to experience remarkable growth during the 1930's.

Because the general desire to economise remained widespread in both South and North, rates had to be kept comparatively low, and in the late 1930's, there was no marked regional contrast in the average amounts raised from ratepayers.

TABLE 7.3: LOCAL AUTHORITY INCOME FROM PUBLIC RATES PER RATEPAYER.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1922-23	£6.3.10	£9.1.5.	£6.6.2.	£4.1.10 <sup>3</sup>
1936-37	£6.4.2.	£7.10.10.	£7.14.7.	£6.13.10. <sup>3</sup>

Table 7.3 shows however that the period saw a marked reduction in the average amounts Halifax Council was extracting from ratepayers, and very little increase in those obtained by Burnley Council, whereas in both Southern towns there were sharp rises.

1. Luton News, May 9, 1929, p. 9.

2. Ministry of Health, Comparative Local Financial Statistics, Part 11, Annual Local Taxation Returns, 1922-23, Table VI; Local Government Financial Statistics, 1936-37, Part 11, Table VII.

Registrar-General, Statistical Review, 1922, Part 11. Civil, Table U; 1938, Part 11. Civil, Table U.

3. The first figure refers to 1925 because this was the earliest year the Luton Abstract of Accounts analysed details of income.

The figures include the precept paid by Luton Council to Bedfordshire County Council.

Borough of Luton, Abstract of Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March 1925, p. 13; 1939, pp. 6 - 7.

In the North it was felt that people were sufficiently highly rated - and in council meetings the view was often expressed and was generally accepted that rates could not rise any further - indeed, in Halifax, that they must be reduced. In the South, however, the rapid expansion of both towns, and the need to provide for additions to the social services, houses, roads, etc., forced councils to increase the rates, though by the late 1930's, there was strong - and successful - pressure in councils to reverse this trend.

The Northern councils were able to limit the amounts they raised from the ratepayers because the Central Government was increasing the financial support it was giving them. Table 7.4 shows the extent to which the Northern towns were coming to rely on the Central Government for support.

TABLE 7.4: GOVERNMENT GRANTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL OF RATE INCOME AND GOVERNMENT GRANTS ADDED TOGETHER.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1922-23	36%	27%	39%	35% <sup>2</sup>
1936-37	49%	38%	39%	29% <sup>2</sup>

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Increased government intervention had both beneficial and dangerous consequences: beneficial because Government grants tended to even out the financial differences between towns which rates collected from industry had tended to widen; dangerous because

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1. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1922-3, Table VI; 1936-7, Table VII.

2. The first Luton figure refers to 1925.

Luton, Accounts, 1925, pp. 13-16; 1937, p. 20; 1939, pp. 6-7.

Government grants gave the central paymaster more and more say in local affairs, reducing local initiative and independence. Alderman Tempest of Ipswich drew the implications of this tendency immediately after the Great War, when he remarked that Government financial assistance and the right to interfere following from this had grown enormously during the war, and was putting major services such as Public Health and Education "beyond the control of the Council." "The other large spending Committee, the Paving and Lighting Committee," he continued "may some day or other come into line ... and ... there is the end of local self-government, the finances are not in your own control."<sup>1</sup>

The principal differences between North and South in terms of expenditure occurred in poor relief, highways, the police and the administration of justice.

Poor relief and highways were closely linked in the minds of Northern councillors, and in the case of Halifax must be considered together. Halifax's traditional policy for dealing with a slump was to employ large numbers of men on public works such as roads and extensions to the trading departments. If expenditure on indoor and outdoor relief is considered alone, the impression that emerges is that Ipswich Council was spending more on poor relief than Halifax. For example in 1931 Burnley spent £1.0.10. on poor relief per head compared to 19s.2d by Halifax and £1.0.1. by Ipswich. However, the expenditure of Halifax on poor relief can only be fully calculated when the activities of the Highways Department are taken into the account.

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1. Ipswich Corporation, Proceedings at Meetings of the Town Council, 1919-20, p. 132.

TABLE 7.5: AVERAGE ANNUAL SPENDING PER PERSON ON HIGHWAYS, STREETS AND BRIDGES.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1922-25	13s.	£1.7s.	14s.7d.	11s.
1934-37	19s.7d.	£1.10s.7d.	£1.4s.7d.	£1.2s.5d.

Halifax Council had traditionally employed men on road building in preference to letting them draw the dole. The number working for Halifax Council in periods of heavy unemployment rose as high as 600 to 700 men,<sup>2</sup> whereas in Ipswich, the peak employment of the workless by the Council, in 1931, was 170.<sup>3</sup> This explains the unusually high spending on highways and bridges in Halifax, which even in the 1930's was greater than in Luton, although that town added 30,000 to its population between 1930 and 1939.

Professor S.G. Checkland has written<sup>4</sup> that in towns where the economy is thriving "crime and indigence are moderate", whereas if the economic base of a town is failing there are "high crime rates". It is worthwhile examining this statement with regard to the North - South contrast. Certainly, spending on crime prevention in the North was higher.

TABLE 7.6: ANNUAL AVERAGE SPENDING PER HEAD ON POLICE, ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE, REFORMATORY SCHOOLS, AND PROBATION OF OFFENDERS.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1922-1925	8s.2d	11s.7d.	7s.	6s.5d.
1934-1937	11s.2d	12s.	8s.7d	6s.7d.

1. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1922-5, 1934-7, Part 11, Table 111. Luton, Accounts, 1922-5, 1934-7.

Populations: Registrar-General's estimates for 1924, 1936.

2. E.g. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, February 6, 1922, p. 5.

3. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1930-31, p. 157. In 1929, Burnley Council planned to employ 650 men on work schemes. Burnley Express, September 7, 1929, p. 16, cols. 1 - 2.

4. H.J. Dyos, The Study of Urban History, p. 353.

Unfortunately, crime statistics are somewhat unreliable because of regional variations in detection and sentencing, and it may be that prosecutions in the North were higher because the Northern towns spent more money on the police. For example, there were more policemen in proportion to population in the North than in the South: in 1931, the population per constable in Burnley was 833, in Halifax 732, in Ipswich 912, and in Luton 1054.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, it may have been that the North acquired a poor reputation because the authorities there were more conscientious. In fact, indictable crime rates were slightly higher in the North during the early 1930's, but the numbers involved were small, and the regional contrast had disappeared by 1937.

TABLE 7.7: NUMBER OF INDICTABLE OFFENSES KNOWN TO THE POLICE PER THOUSAND PEOPLE.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1931-1934	5.2	6.5	3.4	3.0
1937	7.8	8.8	5.0	9.2

The Victorian era of high crime rates and violence had gone. Even when the depression was at its worst, and Lancashire involved in a cotton strike, the infrequency of crime was remarkable, and in 1931, the Recorder of Burnley commented at Burnley Quarter Sessions "when he was a young man at the Bar ... one always had a sort of idea that when there were industrial disputes, criminal work ... increased. It says a great deal for the steadfast loyalty of the population of Burnley that serious crime has been practically non-existent."<sup>3</sup> Compared to the period before the Great

1. Police (Counties and Boroughs, England and Wales). Report of His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for the year ended 29th September, 1931, Table 1; 1931-32 (36).

2. Home Office. Judicial Statistics. England and Wales. 1931, Table XVIII; 1932-33, Cmd.4360; Home Office. Criminal Statistics. England and Wales. 1932, Table XIX; 1933-34, Cmd.4608; 1933, Table XIX, 1934-35, Cmd. 4977; 1934, Table XIX; 1935-36, Cmd. 5185; 1937, Table XVIII; 1938-39, Cmd. 5878.

3. Burnley News, January 24, 1931, p. 3, col. 2.

War, drunkenness declined sharply. Even during the trough of the depression, in 1934, the number of convictions for drunkenness per thousand people was only 0.3 in Burnley, and 0.71 in Halifax, compared to 0.28 in Bedfordshire and 0.44 in Ipswich.<sup>1</sup>

Similarities in finance occurred not only in actual spending, but also in attitudes to it. The keynote of the period was "economy", and this was as strongly stressed in the South as in the North. Councils were subject to constant pressure to make economies from their own members, from the Government, local pressure groups, industrialists, newspapers, and electors (invariably the least voluble group, who generally only expressed their views at election times).

However, most of these groups, arguing from their own self-interest, not only differed from one another about the best method of achieving economies, but could often be found advocating quite contradictory policies within the space of a few months. An example from Halifax illustrates this general tendency. The Halifax Courier and Guardian, affected like many other newspapers in 1921 by the campaign to reduce public expenditure complained that "the country has had its fill of bureaucratic extravagance, but its protests are apparently treated with sheer contempt. It gets abundant assurances of economies effected and to come but, when ever the specific facts are available, it discovers that there has been gross extravagance in just those things that could be systematically regulated."<sup>2</sup> Yet less than one month later, the same paper was troubled by another disturbing feature of 1921, the growing number of unemployed, and observed "the demonstrations by the Halifax unemployed this week have drawn pointed attention to

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1. Home Office, Licensing Statistics. 1934, Table J; 1935-36, Cmd. 5034.

2. Halifax Courier and Guardian, August 13, 1921, p. 6, col. 1.

their unfortunate position ... the policy of the Corporation should be, and we have every confidence will be, to initiate useful and necessary undertakings, some of which it may be possible to launch sooner than intended."<sup>1</sup> The authorities must reduce expenditure at one moment, and increase it the next, depending on which pressure group was making the bigger noise. Such inconsistencies should have provided councils with an argument against giving in to demands for economy. To some extent, as has been mentioned above, on Halifax Council they did so, but for most councillors, and especially the small-minded, economising as a solution to all problems was appealing. There was a marked tendency during the interwar years for councillors to waste more and more time on trivial matters, a tendency that was scorned by one Ipswich Alderman as fatal to the recruitment of able councillors.<sup>2</sup> Others, however, thought that time spent debating trivial economies was not wasted. One of Burnley's interwar mayors declared that "savings had to be looked for in small amounts. There was no very big item [in the estimates] that could be lopped off, but there were an enormous number of small savings which with care could be effected, and which in twelve months would reach a respectable sum."<sup>3</sup> This remark was made at a time when Burnley was not lagging far behind the Southern towns in the amounts it annually spent on building new roads. Editors and reporters who were interested in councils' policies were disturbed by what occasionally seemed to be the frivolity of their debates. A writer in the Burnley News was alarmed by the way councillors would "debate for hours about the expenditure of a trifling sum

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1. Halifax Courier and Guardian, September 3, 1921, p. 6, col. 1.
  2. Ipswich Corporation, Proceedings, 1922-23, p. 97.
  3. Councillor Nuttall. Burnley Express, March 17, 1923, p. 15, col. 4.

and, at the same meeting, will pass, practically without discussion, a proposal involving the expenditure of a fortune."<sup>1</sup> These trifling sums were often salary increases for council employees, and the eagerness with which councillors economised on them shows municipal politics in its most unpleasant light. A variety of motives combined to make local government officials' salaries the most agreeable target for economies.

An application for a salary increase from an official always received considerable attention in the local newspapers and as such applications appeared frequently councillors were able to demonstrate how vigilant they were on behalf of economy. Salary increases were unpopular with electorates: one sign of this was that councillors were much less willing than Aldermen to vote for them. The leader of Ipswich Labour group, R.F.Jackson, in 1926 "warned members of the Council who were not Aldermen, and who voted for the resolution [to increase the Borough Surveyor's salary] that they would be called to account for those votes in November",<sup>2</sup> when the municipal elections took place.

Labour parties in every town generally voted against salary increases for high officials, and exceptions were very rare. The representatives of the poor, the argument ran, should not vote to make the rich richer. The danger of this attack on salaries was that it would deprive local authorities of able officials and frequent changes would destroy the continuity and effectiveness of management. The Northern towns might have been particularly

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1. Burnley News, March 9, 1929, p. 9, col. 5. His remarks were provoked by the Council's decision to build a new fire station at a cost of £20,000 after a few minutes discussion, whereas the granting of a £250 honorarium to the gas engineer was argued for nearly an hour.
  2. East Anglian Daily Times, February 11, 1926, p. 9, col. 3. Cf. the Editor of the Burnley Express on salary increases, May 5, 1923, p. 9, col. 7: "It was curious to notice that Councillors were overwhelmingly against the increases, whilst the Aldermen were for them, with two exceptions. Here we see, in the case of Councillors, signs of the pressure of public opinion; whilst in the case of the Aldermen we see a freedom from such pressure."



vulnerable here, but fortunately for them salaries were no higher in the South than the North because there was strong pressure in Luton and Ipswich to keep them down.<sup>1</sup> Consequently the drift of private enterprise engineers from the North was not matched by a corresponding drift of public officials.<sup>2</sup>

For the Labour party, opposition to salary increases provided a crucial rallying point. They offered the party an opportunity to demonstrate its unity, and stimulated the enthusiasm of supporters. Salary questions could also be relied upon to put the opposition into a state of disarray. Some members were reluctant to allow Labour all the credit for opposing higher salary bills, others were genuinely concerned about the effect these were having on the rates, still others extended the policy of no increases to wages, and opposed pay rises for workmen. It may have been that the time and energy devoted to salary and wage questions was the result of the complexity of most other issues, depriving councillors of the possibility of clear party answers, whereas Labour in particular could have no doubts about opposing a salary increase that was larger than a workman's annual wage. It was possible that the older parties were becoming apprehensive about the effects the granting of salary increases had on the electorate in the 1930's. Ipswich Council conducted discussions about salaries in secret committee, and the Conservative-Liberal majority defeated Labour proposals that the discussions be held in public. Labour, however, made sure that the public always knew what their attitude was by walking out of such meetings.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Burnley Express, June 5, 1926, p. 4, cols. 2 - 3; Burnley News, March 5, 1927, p. 6; February 9, 1929, p. 6, col. 2; Luton News, January 22, 1925, p. 11; April 23, 1925, p. 10; Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, March 1, 1935, p. 9, col. 6; East Anglian Daily Times, June 24, 1920, p. 4; Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, June 3, 1926, p. 6; July 3, 1930, p. 6.
  2. Burnley Express, January 11, 1939, p. 5, col. 2.
  3. East Anglian Daily Times, February 13, 1936, p. 2, col. 4.

TABLE 7.8: SOME EXAMPLES OF DIVISIONS ON SALARY QUESTIONS.

<u>BURNLEY</u>					<u>AGAINST INCREASE</u>			
<u>FOR INCREASE</u>								
<u>LABOUR</u>	<u>CONSERV.</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>	<u>ALD.</u>		<u>LAB</u>	<u>CONS</u>	<u>LIB</u>	<u>ALDERMEN.</u>
1. 0	7	12	7		2	10	4	2
2. 0	— 23 —		-		4	1	1	0
3. 2	1	-	3		4	-	1	-
<u>HALIFAX</u>								
4. 7	1	6	1		0	5	11	4
5. 0	3	15	7		0	12	2	2
6. 0	5	8	3		13	5	11	4
<u>IPSWICH</u>								
7. 0	2	2	2		3	1	1	0
8. 0	2	2	0		4	0	0	0
9. 5	2	0	0		0	7	1	0

Economising policies were not supported by all councillors, even when pressure to squeeze expenditure was at its most severe, i.e. during governmentally inspired economy campaigns. At such times, not surprisingly, the resistance of 'spenders' was at its weakest. Often, 'spenders' were able to persuade councils to defeat an economising proposal by warning of the wrath of the

1. No more salary rises for council officials. Burnley Express, April 5, 1919, p. 11, cols. 1-2.
2. Salary increase for Engineer. Ibid., June 5, 1926, p. 4, cols. 2 - 3.
3. Clerical staffs salary increase. Speakers only included in the table. Labour was divided on this occasion because they were uncertain what attitude to adopt about clerical staff, who were white-collar workers, but who, in some cases, were paid less than workmen. Ibid., February 10, 1934, p. 4.
4. Pay increases for low paid workmen. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 5, 1919, p. 10.
5. Proposal to reduce the salaries of Chief Officials. Ibid., July 5, 1923, p. 5, col. 3.
6. Salary increase for the Gas Manager. Ibid., July 3, 1930, p. 6.
7. East Anglian Daily Times, February 11, 1926, cols. 2-3. Pay rise for the Borough Surveyor. Speakers only.
8. Ipswich Corporation, Proceedings, 1929-30, pp. 173-9. Pay rise for Chief of P.A.C. Speakers only.
9. Ibid., pp. 155 - 167. Employment of Workless by Council. Speakers only.

ministry to come if it was passed, but when the ministries themselves were pressing for economies, the 'spenders' were in a hopeless situation. This did not stop some of them, including several of the ablest members of councils, expressing doubts about the prevailing orthodox view that cutting public expenditure was an essential preliminary to recovering from the depression. The Chairman of Halifax Finance Committee warned in 1932 of the multiplier effects of discharging some of the Council's army of formerly unemployed workmen because their "reduced purchasing power ... seriously affects the trade and welfare of the community."<sup>1</sup> But he did not go as far as the Chairman of the Gas Committee (Waddington), who condemned entirely the official "parsimonious idea of cutting down everything [which] if carried far enough, [will] mean the collapse of the whole nation."<sup>1</sup> Most spenders tended to be mild critics like Dr. Hossack of Ipswich who objected to economies in education because they meant that schoolchildren "will lose a year's schooling for the sake of tuppence." He "likened economy to measles, 'which begins in a small spot and goes all over.' There might be too much economy, and one must be reasonable."<sup>2</sup>

Why were these councillors unsuccessful in preventing economies being made during the early 1930's? Firstly, they were a small minority. Most councillors followed orthodox policies, Labour members as obstinately as Liberals and Conservatives. Secondly, even if a majority had been in favour of some form of counter-cyclical spending, they would have got no help from the Government, on whom they depended for a large proportion of the money for capital investment schemes.

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 31, 1932, p. 7.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, December 17, 1931, p. 4, col. 1.

A third similarity of attitude between these four councils was the view that high rates deter, but low rates attract industry. This theory, combined with electoral considerations, governed councils' deliberations on finance. In 1919, Halifax Council endeavoured to keep its rate increase to a minimum despite the fact that wartime neglect of services necessitated many expensive improvements because "the only test to which people were liable to put a town or district was the bare test of rates, without taking into consideration other circumstances."<sup>1</sup> Also in 1919, the East Anglian Daily Times, giving a similar warning, drew the conclusion that "everything possible should be done to check the alarming increase in the expenditure of the Ipswich Town Council, which is rapidly bringing upon the borough a character which is not likely to prove attractive to new enterprises."<sup>2</sup> Arguments like these were offered to all four councils against taking on fresh commitments, and in a period of mass unemployment, councillors dared not risk repelling a single new firm. This policy had the effect of further restricting Southern councils' willingness to spend on the hard pressed social services.

But were high rates a deterrent to an industrialist looking for a factory site? The Industrial Survey of the Lancashire Area examined this point and found that "the incidence of local rates upon cost of production, at any given stage, in industrial manufacture, was slight even before Derating"<sup>3</sup> and concluded that the rate "is a factor in industrial localization ... the power of which has been exaggerated."<sup>4</sup> In the present study Burnley's rates were almost always lower than those of Halifax and Ipswich, but Burnley still fared worse economically. Other factors were

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1. Halifax Evening Courier, March 26, 1919, p. 3, col. 3.
  2. East Anglian Daily Times, March 6, 1919, p. 4, col. 4.
  3. Italics in the original. Board of Trade, An Industrial Survey of the Lancashire Area, p. 291.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

were much more important: proximity to London, cheap flat land, ample social amenities, a pleasant environment etc. Nonetheless, it must be said that the industrialist with a factory in a town whose rates seemed to be too high, or were moving in that direction, took great interest in the council's debates about the rates, and attempted to exert pressure to keep them low. A motive, perhaps not the major one, but nevertheless of some significance, for an industrialist or businessman joining a council was the desire to check exactly what councils wanted to do, and to make sure they did not spend too much money doing it. Business men were the most vocal opponents of the building of a new town hall in Luton, and the leading economiser in Ipswich in the mid-1930's was a member of the Fison family, who owned the fertilizer firm. The Chairman of Crossley Carpets in Halifax warned in 1925<sup>1</sup> that local rates were too high and were hindering production and exports. It consequently became an act of some courage for a chairman of a Finance Committee to press for a rate increase.

The Northern councils were able to dispose of approximately the same amounts of money as Ipswich and Luton councils. The difficulty they faced was in deciding the right order of priorities. The health services were developed everywhere despite the slump, and expenditure on medical health services in particular rose fast, with a gap developing in favour of the Northern towns as the period proceeded.

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 28, 1925, p. 7, col. 5.

TABLE 7.9: AVERAGE SPENDING PER PERSON ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND DIRECT (I.E. MEDICAL) HEALTH SERVICES, 1922-25 COMPARED TO 1934-37.<sup>1</sup>

<u>ENVIRONMENTAL</u>	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
AVERAGE OF 1922-25	11s.7d	19s.2d	8s.5d	11s.10d
" " 1934-37	14s.2d	19s.1d	11s.7d	15s.1d
<u>DIRECT</u>				
AVERAGE OF 1922-25	8s.5d	7s.8d	9s.8d	3s.11d
" " 1934-37	19s.11d	£1.3s.7d	15s.2d	7s.1d

The other services were more likely to be casualties of the depression. Education was a constant and favourite target for the economisers, and Departments of Education were under steady pressure to lower their estimates. Generally, this pressure was resisted, and Table 7.10 shows that resistance was as effective in the North as in the South.

TABLE 7.10: AVERAGE EXPENDITURE PER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
AVERAGE OF 1922-25	£10.18.2	£14.16.11	£10.5.11	£9.18.1
" " 1934-37	£15.10.3	£14.18.1	£12.8.1	£12.2.1

Indeed, spending on elementary education resembled that on the direct health services, in as much as a regional gap had developed by the end of the period, in favour of the North.

A more justifiable, but much less frequently attacked target for economies was the roads, and particularly capital expenditure on new roads, and bridges. However, during the interwar period, capital spending on highways, bridges, sewers and refuse collection

1. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1922-5, 1934-7, Part 11, Table 111; Luton, Accounts, 1922-5, 1934-7; Populations: Registrar-General's estimates for 1924, 1936.

2. Board of Education, Cost per Child, List 43, 1921-23, Table 10; 1924-25, Table 11; 1937, Table 8.

was almost as high in the North as in the South.

TABLE 7.11: CAPITAL SPENDING PER HEAD ON ROADS, BRIDGES, AND REFUSE COLLECTION.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
TOTAL SPENDING 1921-9	£3.6.1	£4.2.11	£3.12.11	£3. 2.0
" " 1930-7	£4.3.1	£5.5.1	£6.4.6	£6.15.6
	<u>£7.9.2</u>	<u>£9.8.0</u>	<u>£9.17.5</u>	<u>£9.17.6</u>

The pressure which population growth and suburban development were putting on the finances of the Southern towns in the 1930's is apparent from this table. Expenditure more than doubled from the earlier decade in Luton, whilst in Ipswich there was a 70% rise. Yet, adding the amounts spent in the two periods together, there was not a great regional divergence. This seems surprising in view of the time the Northern towns spent debating minor economies, and the great pressure on limited resources there. Formidable economies could clearly have been made by cutting down expenditure on repairing roads. There were misgivings in both Burnley and Halifax about the number and utility of new roads that were being built.<sup>2</sup> The Editor of the Burnley Express wrote that "we do not want any more money spent on roads which, when completed, are valueless, because they lead into bottlenecks, or lead to nowhere in particular."<sup>3</sup> Few councillors, however, voiced similar criticisms. Most of them accepted the argument that the high rates of expenditure on roads were necessary to provide

1. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1921-1937, Part 11, Table 111; Luton, Accounts, 1921-1937; Populations: Registrar-General's estimates for 1925, 1933.
2. For example, between 1923 and 1932, the mileage of roads maintained by Burnley Council increased by 10.3 miles compared to an increase of 15.2 miles in Ipswich. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1921-1933, Part 11, Table 111.
3. Burnley Express, February 9, 1924, p. 10, col. 1.

work for the unemployed. No councillor posed the question of whether it was better instead to spend the money on houses, which would not only have provided employment, but would also have carried out a necessary social service in moving people out of the slums.

The result was that in the provision of new houses, Burnley and Halifax lagged behind Ipswich in the number built (though when population change and slum clearance are taken into the account, they were at least as active), but fared extremely well compared to Luton Council, which, in the 1930's, appears to have abandoned its housing responsibilities.

TABLE 7.12: THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND HOUSING.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
POPULATION CHANGE 1921-1939:	-17,757	-1012	+20,263	+43,731
TOTAL NUMBER OF NEW LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSES BUILT 1919-1938:	2,392	2,632	2,981	1,088
TOTAL CAPITAL EXPENDITURE 1921-1937:	£1,200,616	£936,874	£1,494,852	£593,869

Capital expenditure on housing accounted for approximately half the total capital investment of these four towns. The differences in the amounts invested were not particularly great from South to North, and as social capital had been built up to a greater extent before 1914 in the North, this may indicate that one of the consequences of depression was that not only did it dampen the enthusiasm and weaken the capacity of councils in depressed areas to undertake fresh capital investment, but it had the same effect in prosperous regions, forcing even Luton Council

1. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1921-1937, Part 11, Table 111; Luton, Accounts, 1921-1937.  
 Council houses: footnotes after Table 5.5.  
Census 1921 General Report, pp. 25-26.  
 General Register Office, National Registration 1939, Table 3.  
Census 1951 Preliminary Report, Table III.



"to proceed cautiously until the national finances and employment generally become more stabilised."<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 7.13: CAPITAL INVESTMENT BY ALL NON-TRADING DEPARTMENTS PER PERSON, AND TOTALS, 1920-1937.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
PER HEAD	£26.4s	£22.4s	£32.8s	£21.
TOTAL	£2,470,000	£2,200,000	£2,911,500	£1,660,150

Most capital expenditure was financed by borrowing and during this period the amounts of money spent annually on paying off debts rose fast in all four towns, but especially fast in the South.

TABLE 7.14: AMOUNTS OF MONEY SPENT PER HEAD ON LOAN CHARGES.<sup>3</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	10s	17s	12s	9s
1937	£1.8s	£1.13s	£1. 17s	£2.7s.

Tables 7.13 and 7.13A show that capital expenditure between the two regions did not differ greatly, yet loan charges showed a sharp regional difference: the jump in Luton is particularly striking. It is unlikely that the hard pressed Northern towns preferred to pay for more of their capital investment out of current revenue than the Southern: but it may have been that they were forced to do this if they found it difficult to raise the money

1. Luton News, April 3, 1930, p. 13, col. 2.

2. The Trading Departments will be examined in a separate chapter. Comparisons between the spending of all departments including the trading departments tend to bear out the above conclusions for they do not reveal a pronounced gap between North and South.

Table 7.13A: Capital investment of all council departments, 1920-37.

	<u>Burnley</u>	<u>Halifax</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>Luton</u>
Per head	£41.14s	£55.8s	£47.18s	£54.16s
Totals	£3,940,000	£5,460,800	£4,285,500	£4,325,200

Population in Tables 7.13 and 7.13A is the average of the Census of 1921 and the National Register of 1939.

Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1920-1937, Part 11, Table 111; Luton, Accounts, 1920-1937.

3. Non-trading departments only. Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1920-21, Part 11, Table 111; 1936-37, Part 11, Table 111; Luton, Accounts, 1921, 1937.

they needed through loans. Certainly Burnley Council had some difficulty in obtaining a loan from the Ministry of Health in the late 1930's to finance its new industries scheme. The rapid increase in loan repayments in the South indicates that these towns did not face too much hardship in getting people to lend them money. If this is so, it indicates a most important regional difference: that the Northern towns during this period were considered as comparatively unattractive places to which to lend money.

The balance against the North was redressed considerably by their much stronger committee systems, and by the central role the Finance Committee played on both Burnley and Halifax councils. The chairman of this committee was the most powerful man on these councils, and one indication of this was that he was always referred to in the press as "our local Chancellor of the Exchequer", a designation not so often given in the South. The chairman's position had become powerful because once elected he remained in office till he resigned or died, and could usually plan council spending policies several years ahead. Between 1920 and 1939, four men were chairmen of Burnley's Finance Committee, and there were also four chairmen in Halifax, whereas Luton had a different chairman nearly every year (five between 1919 and 1927), and in Ipswich the estimates were decided separately by the chairman of the Education Committee, and the chairman of the Finance Committee for all the other departments. The latter had no power over the former, and could not cut his estimates.

Secondly, the chairmanship of the Finance Committee in the North was the peak ambition of a councillor because it carried

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more authority and prestige than any other position on the council, including the Mayoralty, and the men who aspired to it had to have a powerful position in their party. Grey, Lynch, and Parkinson, who followed one another as Chairmen in Burnley from 1922 to 1939 were respectively leaders of the town's Liberal, Labour, and Conservative parties. Clay and Whittaker, Halifax's chairmen from 1920 to 1936, were also successively chairman of the town's Liberal association, the town's largest party.

Thirdly, in the North, the chairman of the Finance Committee had developed the authority before 1914 to have the estimates of subsidiary committees submitted to him, and he could trim them if he wanted. Indeed, one way for a new chairman to show his power was to cut the estimates of prominent chairmen of other committees, and this is what Lynch did in 1936 when he became Labour's first Finance Committee chairman.<sup>1</sup>

Such action would have been unthinkable in Luton and Ipswich. In Ipswich there was no co-ordination of expenditure between the various committees. One Ipswich Chairman complained of the difficulty of trying to govern the town because "each Committee brought forward its proposals before the Council and had them generally approved, without the Council realising the whole financial position."<sup>2</sup> A defender of the independence of committee chairmen argued that "it would be impossible to carry on the work of the Council if every Committee had to go first to the Finance Committee."<sup>3</sup> Critics were unsuccessful in changing Ipswich's system because the subordinate chairmen were determined not to delegate any more authority to the Chairman of the Finance Committee. The situation in Luton was very similar to this.

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1. Burnley Express, March 14, 1936, p. 16, col. 3.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, August 14, 1930, p. 4, col. 1.

3. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, May 14, 1920, p. 10, col. 1.

There is little doubt that the economic situation in the North was an important factor in strengthening the already formidable powers of the chairman there, whereas greater prosperity in the South enabled councils to proceed without creating a strong central authority. The importance of such an authority <sup>e</sup>becomes <sub>L</sub> apparent when the year-to-year management of finance in these four towns is compared. Northern chairmen could plan ahead more confidently, they could get their own way more often, they could take an unpopular line with less fear of rebellion than was the case in the South. The most unpopular line was to resist the temptation to reduce the rates in prosperous years: it was a test of a chairman's tenacity and foresight to refuse to curry popularity with both councillors and the ratepayers by a rate reduction that might prove only too temporary.

For chairmen, the interwar years were difficult, and no part of them so difficult as the period immediately following the end of the war. In addition to new responsibilities such as housing given them by the Government, they had to pay for work not done during the war, especially in the trading departments, at a time when prices of materials and men were rising fast. The shock administered to councils by the rate rises of 1918-1922 gave all of them great respect for a stabilised rate, and too much respect for a chairman who could produce a steady series of rate decreases, which was usually done at the expense of some public service.

In Ipswich, the rates had reached 18s.6d. by 1920 (from 11s.2d. in 1919)<sup>1</sup>, but by reducing the estimates every year, by 1923 they were down to 15s.8d.<sup>2</sup> To prevent them rising again, schemes were postponed, and the reserves raided and not replaced.

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, March 11, 1920, p. 3.

2. Ibid., March 15, 1923, p. 6.

The Chairman of the Finance Committee defended this policy in 1928: "So long as our service is properly carried on, we prefer that the money should fructify in the pockets of the people rather than that we should build up unnecessarily large balances and keep them in the bank."<sup>1</sup> In 1929, the Council inherited £13,000 from the Board of Guardians but even a reserve of that size was "unnecessarily heaped up" in the view of the Chairman of the Finance Committee.<sup>2</sup> Between 1927 and 1929, the rate was further lowered to 13s.4d,<sup>3</sup> - too low in fact, for any extension of the Council's responsibilities would certainly have sent it up again.

And it was apparent to many in the town that these extra commitments would soon have to be undertaken. The East Anglian Daily Times, a staunch supporter of the policy of cutting the estimates and lowering the rates in the early twenties, by 1930, was worrying about the future: "Ipswich in recent years has been going ahead in a very remarkable manner ... Such growth affects the borough in two or three ways chiefly: in regard to streets and roads with the necessary lighting and drainage, in sewerage arrangements, and in regard to the necessary provision for the education of the extra children. [All this] is bound to cost very much more as time goes on."<sup>3</sup> Such warnings went unheeded. In 1931, the Council refused to increase the rate by one shilling,<sup>4</sup> and this involved abandoning a scheme, which, as it presents a direct contrast to similar developments in Burnley, is worth considering. The direct intervention of the Council - by building a factory for £10,500 - in industry was required. The factory would be let to a concern which wished to occupy a site near the Council's recently established and costly airport. The scheme was attacked in the Council as too

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- East Anglian Daily Times
1. ~~March~~, March 15, 1928, p. 5, col. 3.
  2. Ibid., March 28, 1929, p. 2, col. 4.
  3. Ibid., March 27, 1930, p. 6, col. 4.
  4. Ibid., March 26, 1931, p. 4.

expensive, because the rents to be charged would not recoup the expense of building the factory sufficiently quickly. Consequently negotiations were broken off. It was a confident council that in 1932 could thus have turned away a new industry.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1932 and 1938, the expenditure of just two committees, Health and Education rose by almost £75,000,<sup>2</sup> and the result was a series of rate increases that soon lost the patience of the Council. In 1938, the rate was decided in the following manner. The Finance Committee suggested a rate of 14s.10d. "Mr.F.G.C.Fison proposed that the rate should be 14s.6d. .. saying that he thought the Finance Committee had underestimated the product of a penny rate... immediately [the resolution] was adopted Mr.Bourke said that as they were all having a bit of fun that morning he proposed the rate to be 14s.4d. in the pound. The Mayor: 'Do you wish me to put that to the meeting?' Mr.Bourke: 'Yes, I am as serious as Mr.Fison.' The new resolution was put, receiving 16 votes, but was defeated. Mr. Jackson said he wanted to know what the position of the Council now was."<sup>2</sup>

The position was that the Finance Committee had lost control of the situation. This was serious because it should have been secure in the support of the Conservative and Liberal parties, at a time when the Labour party was making a strong challenge, demanding especially improvements in the Council's provision in education and health, the departments most affected by the rate cut. The decision to make this economy is an indication of the fear that some councillors had that Ipswich was taxing itself off the economic map, but the rates were not higher at anytime in the 1930's than they were in Halifax, a town accustomed to spend much more

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, August 4, 1932, p. 2.

2. Ibid., March 31, 1938, p. 12, col. 1.

on its social services. The reaction of the older parties in Ipswich - and there was a very similar reaction in Luton about the same time - shows an interesting difference between Conservatives and Liberals in the South, and their counterparts in the North. In the North, members of the older parties were as energetic as Labour in improving social capital: for example, they were the inspirers of the extensions to Halifax General Hospital between 1930 and 1938, and were responsible for the improvements to the Technical College. In Burnley, Conservatives and Liberals along with Labour councillors played a major part in pioneering the development of new industries.

Burnley Council was the only one to experience a change of party control, in the mid-1930's, but the most surprising fact about Labour rule was that in many ways, it resembled very closely the management of the Conservatives and Liberals, especially in Finance. There was the same respect for a stabilised rate, and the same reluctance at first to raid the reserves. These had been built up by Alderman Grey during the 1920's, when the rate produced more money than the Council spent, and the surplus was banked, the fund increasing by £50,000 in just three years, from 1927 to 1930.<sup>1</sup>

Such a policy of strict financing left a lot of work undone. In 1919, influenced by the enthusiasm of victory, the Council drew up a programme of public works which would have cost £2,250,000 to carry out.<sup>2</sup> Twenty years later, large sections of the plan were still incomplete, mainly the least useful, such as the scheme to spend £200,000 extending the Town Hall. As late as 1932, the Burnley Express headed its report on the Chairman's presentation of the estimates: "Burnley's Sound Financial Position."<sup>3</sup> But

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1. Burnley Express, March 19, 1927, p. 14.

2. Ibid., October 22, 1919, p. 6, cols. 1-2.

3. Ibid., March 19, 1932, p. 5.

thereafter the situation grew rapidly worse.

Although income did not decline very much, the demands made on the Council grew fast. Every year, the estimates of the P.A.C. were found to have fallen short of the amounts actually needed, there were school meals for the poor to be provided,<sup>1</sup> and both the Government and the Labour party were demanding that the Council clear slums and build council houses. The result of that was that the Council embarked on a housing scheme costing £500,000 in 1933.<sup>2</sup> In 1934, however, making a comparison that struck growing numbers of Northerners at this time, Grey warned "the outlook is none too bright. If we, with all our municipal advantages could be surrounded by those evidences of expansion and recovery - one might almost say opulence - that one sees in other parts of the country, with our municipal record and our financial position associated with such an outlook, we should be regarded as one of the strongest, soundest and safest municipalities in the United Kingdom."<sup>3</sup> But as they were not surrounded by any such things, the only solution was a programme of economies.

Yet, within one year of the delivery of this speech, Burnley Council had embarked on its most ambitious and costly scheme of the interwar years. This was done without raising the rates, which remained at 12s. in the pound from 1927 to 1937, but by raiding the balances, trading departments' profits and reserves to the amount of £211,875, or £2.5s. per head.<sup>4</sup> This was a policy of enormous risk - it was delaying the evil day of a rate increase, and it was reducing the Council's savings almost to vanishing point. Therefore it was essential that such a policy be amply justified, and indeed it was not done merely to keep the rates low as in

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1. Ibid., March 14, 1931, p. 4; March 18, 1933, p. 5; March 24, 1934, p. 3.

2. Ibid., September 30, 1933, p. 18, col. 3.

3. Ibid., March 24, 1934, p. 3, col. 3.

4. Of Burnley's 1934 population. Ibid., March 20, 1937, p. 13, 18.



Ipswich, or to build a huge white elephant of a Town Hall as in Luton, but to bring new industries to the town.

The failure of the market forces to do this forced the Council to take some action. It appointed a special sub-committee at the start of 1935, which set about its task energetically and in its first year brought six firms to Burnley. But its boldest step was to build and equip a new factory at a cost of £84,000, which brought the total it had spent to almost £200,000.<sup>1</sup> Much of this money had to be borrowed from the Ministry of Health, but the Council might have expected that in view of the 8,500 unemployed<sup>2</sup> in Burnley the Ministry would have been only too willing to assist in the employment of 200 of them. In fact, the Ministry did lend the Council the money it had asked for, but it was clearly unhappy about this breach of contemporary economic orthodoxy. The crucial factor in persuading the Ministry was probably that the Council had already entered into legal agreements with the American firm of Platers and Stampers. It made sure Burnley Council did not repeat this policy by ordering it on all future occasions to apply to the Ministry before proceeding. Nonetheless, by the end of 1939, it was estimated that more than 3,100 people were working in the new industries,<sup>3</sup> and the transformation of the town's industrial base, which the war was to complete, had been begun.

Luton Council was aware of its good fortune compared to many councils in other parts of Britain at this time, as a Luton News reporter observed in 1931 when he wrote "Tuesday night was Budget night with Luton Town Council, and the Deputy Mayor found himself in a much happier position in submitting the municipal estimates

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1. Burnley Express, May 29, 1937, p. 20, col. 4; June 5, 1937, p. 12, col. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1938, p. 14, col. 5.

3. *Ibid.*, July 28, 1937, p. 8, cols. 1 - 2; January 1, 1938, p. 14; June 29, 1938, p. 8, col. 1.

for the year than Mr. Philip Snowden is likely to occupy when he presents the national Budget to the House of Commons later in the month."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this rare good fortune appears to have made Luton Council especially cautious. In many respects, Luton's economies were even more cheeseparing than those elsewhere: for example, in 1922, the Education Committee saved £875 on schoolbooks and furniture, and the boots allowance of each policeman was cut from £5.4s to £2.12s by the Watch Committee.<sup>2</sup> And as regards salaries, the Chairman of the Finance Committee admitted that "it was generally conceded for the borough of Luton, to put it mildly, that they were not noted for paying their officers and staff any exorbitant amounts."<sup>3</sup>

However, Luton Council was prepared to spend money on a large scale if it felt this necessary, as when in 1929 it decided to build a new Town Hall for £250,000.<sup>4</sup> It had several reasons for this. The town had no large hall (the old hall had been burnt down in a riot in 1919) for council and public meetings, its offices were dispersed all over the town;<sup>5</sup> Luton was sadly deficient in substantial buildings, and an impressive Town Hall might perhaps have strengthened the town's claim to higher municipal status.

The Town Hall scheme became the central issue in local politics in Luton for several years, unfortunately distracting attention from the town's deficiencies in the social services. The majority of those ratepayers who voted were opposed to it (the council was in such ill-odour at this time that five of the six candidates seeking re-election in the 1929 municipal elections

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1. Luton News, April 2, 1931, p. 9, col. 1.

2. Ibid., April 6, 1922, p. 9.

3. Ibid., April 6, 1922, p. 9, col. 3.

4. Ibid., July 25, 1929, p. 9, col. 5.

5. Ibid., January 1, 1931, p. 9.

were defeated, including two who had opposed building the new Town Hall)<sup>1</sup> and so were several of the town's principal firms, who called public meetings to organise opposition to the Hall.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the Council was virtually unanimous in its determination to proceed,<sup>3</sup> and opposition then centred on cutting down the expense. Was the tower necessary, and must it have a clock on it? There was a great deal of criticism of the "embellishments" inside the Hall.<sup>4</sup> Even the hostility of the Minister did not dissuade the Council. He first insisted that the cost of the Hall be reduced from £200,000 to £150,000<sup>5</sup> (which was done by scrapping the embellishments), and secondly, he turned down the Council's application for an unemployment grant towards the cost of the Town Hall, which was hardly surprising in view of the limited amount of unemployment that existed in Luton.<sup>6</sup> The Town Hall was completed, and in 1936 it was opened by the Duke of Kent.

Unfortunately the effort to build the Town Hall seems to have exhausted the energies of the Council. They had made their great effort, and once the building was under construction, they lapsed again into lethargy. During the twenties, Luton Council spent less per head on 'direct' health services, elementary schooling, and capital investment on roads, bridges etc., than the other three towns, but instead of attempting to remedy these defects, it lowered the rates every year from 1930 to 1933 (from 11s. to 8s.9d)<sup>7</sup>, leaving no spare money for any improvements.

As in Ipswich, these low figures could not be maintained, and in 1934 the Chairman of the Finance Committee warned that heavy demands on the rates would come in the future: amongst other

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1. This was an unusual occurrence in Luton: in six previous elections where candidates were seeking re-election, five were re-elected. Luton News, November 4, 1926, p. 16; November 3, 1927, p.8; November 8, 1928, p. 5; November 7, 1929, p. 4.
  2. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1931, p. 9.
  3. Cheap suburban sites were rejected in favour of an expensive central one by 27 votes to 1. *Ibid.*, February 20, 1930, p. 13.
  4. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1930, p. 9.
  5. *Ibid.*, March 5, 1931, p. 9.
  6. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1931, p. 13.
  7. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1930, p. 13; April 2, 1931, p. 9; April 6, 1933, p. 11.

amenities, the town needed a new maternity home, police station, swimming pool, and more council houses.<sup>1</sup> From 1934 to 1939 the rates rose even faster than they had fallen during the previous four years, reaching 12s.8d in 1939.<sup>2</sup> A rate rise of that size however could not pay for all the town's requirements, and Luton's budgeting became an annual tussle between 'economisers' and 'spenders', the former arguing that the town's "expansion depended very largely on its low rates"<sup>3</sup> and the latter that "it is only to a very small extent that these reductions [in the estimates] represent real economies. For the most part they are due to the postponement of schemes."<sup>4</sup> The struggle was decided in favour of the 'economisers' and in 1936, the Chairman of the Finance Committee was forced by the Council to cut the estimates he had prepared.<sup>4</sup> As in Ipswich, the Chairman was defeated by his own supposed supporters, for though Labour in Luton was making a strong challenge on social matters, it was still very much a minority party. Much more important however, the rate cut made the Chairman nervous that similar humiliations might occur in following years, and the result was that Luton's requirements were consistently underestimated, and thus the Council was unable to make full use of the last boom period before the war to remedy the town's inadequacies in Health, Housing, and Education.

Management of finance in Halifax was not upset by extraordinary schemes like Burnley's New Industries Programme or Luton's new Town Hall. The Council was hard hit by the post-war crisis which sent up the rates in one year from 12s.10d to 19s.9d.<sup>5</sup> By 1923 the rate had been reduced to 15s.6d, as a result of drastic economies (the Chairman cut the estimates one year by £73,000<sup>6</sup>),

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1. Luton News, April 5, 1934, p. 9, col. 1.

2. Ibid., March 2, 1939, p. 11.

3. Ibid., April 4, 1935, p. 14, col. 5.

4. Ibid., April 2, 1936, p. 13, col. 1.

5. Halifax Evening Courier, April 1, 1920, p. 2, col. 3.

6. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 6, 1922, p. 5, col.3.

by raiding trading department profits, and by a revaluation. At 15s.6d they remained till 1932, and as in Burnley, the Halifax newspapers felt able to celebrate "the Financial Soundness of Halifax" as late as 1930.<sup>1</sup> The Finance Committee's reaction to depression presents an interesting comparison to management in the South, where, in Ipswich the rates were maintained at an artificially low level by raiding the reserves of £50,000,<sup>2</sup> whilst in Luton, the rates were reduced by a total of 2s.3d between 1930 and 1933. In Halifax, already higher rated than the other three towns, they were cut once, in 1932, but only by sixpence.<sup>3</sup> The reason was Halifax Council's large scale employment of workers: Whittaker defended his depression policy because "many of the schemes introduced to, and sanctioned, by the council ... have been rendered necessary by the need for providing work for those who are in the unfortunate position of having to apply to the Labour Exchange for relief, and it will be agreed by all parties that where work can be given and money earned, the position is far more desirable than paying out money without any return in service."<sup>4</sup> It was a mild form of counter-cyclical spending, employing less than a thousand men, but it showed a different attitude to that of Ipswich Council, which only kept on its 170 workless in 1931 by a majority of one vote.<sup>5</sup> After 1934, Halifax was more fortunate than Burnley, recovery there was marked, and the Council was able to turn its endeavours to the improvement of the social services, and particularly to slum clearance, maternity and health services, and technical education.

A combination of factors enabled Burnley and Halifax councils to maintain their spending on the principal services on broadly

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 27, 1930, p. 3.
  2. East Anglian Daily Times, March 26, 1931, p. 4, col. 1; March 30, 1933, p. 5, col. 1.
  3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 31, 1932, p. 7.
  4. *Ibid.*, March 26, 1931, p. 6, col. 3.
  5. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1930-31, pp. 155 - 167.

the same levels as Luton and Ipswich. The deratings, though principally designed to aid industry, to a considerable extent redistributed wealth between the two regions. Pressure for economy affected all four councils and limited, or gave them an excuse to limit, the extent of their activities. This was more serious in the South, where social capital provided before 1914 was inferior, and under great pressure after 1918 because of population growth and migration. The pre-eminence of the Finance Committee and its Chairman ensured some degree of planning and centralised organisation in the North, and the more tightly controlled parties made certain that Chairmen would not suffer public defeats in the council chamber as happened in both Ipswich and Luton. Finally, continued large scale poverty in the South made councils reluctant to see the rates rise too fast, a view that was reinforced by middle class opposition to heavy rate increases.

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CHAPTER EIGHTMUNICIPAL POLITICS.

This chapter examines local government in the four towns. The municipalities played an important role in bringing about improvements to the social services, and in closing the North - South gap in the provision of health services and education and in the improvement of the quality of housing that had existed at the end of the First World War. The purpose of this chapter is to enquire into the regional differences in local government, with the aim of isolating the political factors that contributed to its superior quality in the North.

The principal of these were, firstly, the rise of the Labour party and the speed with which its representatives were accommodated within the local political systems. Although the party grew fast during this period in all four towns, the older parties in the North proved to be more accomodating to its representatives than did those in the South. This had two consequences of importance: the leaders of the most discontented groups in society were operating within the traditional political system - an important factor explaining why there was no serious breakdown in law and order during this period; and the Northern local authorities were tapping reserves of ability that the Southern councils denied themselves till almost the end of the period. Consequently, the rise of the Labour party will be studied first in this chapter.

At the same time that Labour was gaining strength, the Liberal party was losing it. Yet the Liberal party was a repository of much local political talent, and it represented strong - though declining - forces in society. It appears from a study of events in

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these four towns that where local Liberal groups retained their independence and vitality, the quality of local government was greatly enhanced, whereas the disappearance of a Liberal group brought about a severe loss of administrative talent. Local government in the North was abler, in part at least, because local Liberal groups survived in strength there, whereas in the South by 1939, they had largely amalgamated with the Conservative parties. Therefore, the varying fortunes of the local Liberal parties will constitute the second component of this chapter.

Thirdly, it is important to examine the links between councillors and social and religious organisations in the towns. During this period, councillors played important roles in churches and societies, and their membership put them in contact with various strands of public opinion and pressure groups, and made them aware of grievances which they could bring to the notice of their colleagues on the council. There was a contrast between North and South during this period in the extent of these contacts. A larger number of the elements of society in the North turned towards and fed off councils than did so in the South. The usefulness of such connections, and the impact they could have on the decision making processes of a council were likely to be greater in proportion to the size of the total membership of churches and societies. Consequently, councillors' links with churches and societies, and the changes in the strength of these, forms the third theme of this chapter.

The Labour party rose to eminence in both national and local politics almost overnight. In the parliamentary election of 1918 the party won Burnley; in 1923 it captured Ipswich; and in 1928

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in a bye-election it gained Halifax, and might have done so much sooner had the seat not been held by the Speaker, who was not opposed by the major parties. In the last local elections before the Great War, the Labour party had nowhere polled over 25% (22% in Burnley, 23% in Halifax, 11% in Ipswich, and 9% in Luton<sup>1</sup>). By 1919, the party had become easily the largest in three of the towns, polling 46% in Burnley, 35% in Halifax, 38% in Luton, and 52% of the total votes cast in Ipswich.<sup>2</sup> The Halifax total did not reflect the real strength of the party because two Labour councillors were returned unopposed<sup>3</sup> - itself a sign of strength. The challenge of Labour in Luton proved to be muted - temporarily - in that the party won only one seat.<sup>4</sup>

It is necessary to ask at this point how far was Labour growth in these towns the result of the impact of national issues and how far was it a consequence of local developments? An indication can be obtained from a table of the gains and losses made by the Labour party.

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1. Burnley Express, November 5, 1913, p. 2, col.1; Halifax Courier, November 8, 1913, p. 5, col. 1; East Anglian Daily Times, November 3, 1913, p. 5, col. 2; Luton News, November 6, 1913, p. 5, col. 4.
  2. Burnley Express, November 5, 1919, p. 4, col.1; Halifax Courier, November 8, 1919, p. 8; Luton News, November 6, 1919, p. 8, col. 2; East Anglian Daily Times, November 3, 1919, p. 8, col. 2.
  3. Halifax Courier, November 8, 1919, p. 8.
  4. Luton News, November 6, 1919, p. 8, col. 2.

TABLE 8.1: NET GAINS (+) AND LOSSES (-) OF COUNCIL SEATS BY THE  
LABOUR PARTY, 1919 - 1938.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1919	+6	+2	+6	+1
1920				
1921	+2	+1	-1	
1922	-6	-1	-1	
1923		+1		
1924		-1		
1925	+1	+1		
1926	+1	+1	+2	
1927	-1		+2	
1928	+2		+1	
1929	+4		+2	
1930	-1		-1	
1931	-1	-1	-4	-1
1932	+2	+1	+3	
1933	+6		+5	+1
1934	+5	+1	+2	+1
1935	-1	-2	-2	+3
1936	-2	-2	-4	+1
1937		+3	+4	+2
1938	-6	-1	-1	+2
<hr/>				
NET GAIN BY 1938	+11	+3	+13	+10
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Table 8.1 confirms that in years when the Labour party was doing well nationally, it also prospered locally: for example, Labour parties gained seats in 1919, 1923, 1928, 1929, 1932-34, and 1937, but lost them in 1922, 1930, 1931, 1935, and 1938 (with the exception of Luton, in which town special circumstances were in operation). This shows that local voting was clearly influenced by national issues. But evidence that local movements were also influential is apparent from the table. In terms of the total number of gains and losses, Burnley was the most volatile with 47 - the sharp fluctuations reflecting the depth of the dissatisfaction in the town about its economic situation: deeply discontented with the Conservatives and Liberals between 1928 and 1934 and with Labour between 1935 and 1938. Ipswich was also volatile - the impact of unemployment is apparent in the gains Labour made between 1932 and 1934, followed by Conservative recovery in the economic boom of 1935 and 1936. Halifax, by comparison, was remarkably tranquil: in a much more gentle way it followed the pattern apparent in Burnley and Ipswich. The most tenacious battles Labour fought in Halifax occurred in parliamentary elections: the party won two of the four which were fought by the main political parties between 1928 and 1935. Luton was the most exceptional of these towns for the growth of the Labour party was concentrated within one short period: ten of the 11 seats Labour <sup>a</sup>gained were won between 1933 and 1938, and during that period, the party suffered none of the setbacks it endured in Burnley, Halifax, and Ipswich. Special factors were operating here (migration from pro-Labour areas; the fact that gains were built up from a very small base) but the success of the party was so substantial that it demonstrates the great

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dissatisfaction in the town about social conditions, the quality of the social services, and the prevalence of poverty. In 1938, the party polled better in Luton (50% of the votes cast) and in Ipswich (45%), than it did in Burnley (43%) and Halifax (44%).<sup>1</sup>

The impact of national issues and of local unemployment and poverty were thus clearly of major importance in facilitating the growth of the Labour party. But other factors were of significance also, and perhaps the principal among them was the strength of the Trades Unions. As the unions developed so did the Labour party. Halifax and Burnley had large union movements before 1914, and important Labour parties, whereas in Ipswich and Luton, both unions and Labour parties were weak. The 1930's saw important union growth in the South, and particularly in Luton, and it was during this decade that the Labour party made its most sustained gains. At least half the first ten Luton Labour councillors had at some time worked in the engineering industry, which was fast becoming unionised during this decade.<sup>2</sup> The unions brought many assets to the Labour party: principally finance, the ability to inform large numbers of members about Labour policies, and political expertise. Trade Union Secretaries were very influential amongst Labour councillors, especially in the North, as the table below shows.

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1. Burnley Express, November 2, 1938, p. 8.  
Luton News, November 3, 1938, p. 7.  
Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, November 2, 1938, p. 7.  
East Anglian Daily Times, November 2, 1938, p. 12.

2. Luton News, October 31, 1935, p. 11, col. 4; October 27, 1938, p. 9, col. 1.

TABLE 8.2: LABOUR COUNCILLORS 1919-1938, DIVIDED BY OCCUPATION,  
IN PERCENTAGES.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
TRADE UNION SECRETARIES	42	30	20	10
WHITE COLLAR WORKERS	24	37	32	30
LABOURERS	34	33	48	60
<hr/>				
THE ABOVE AS A % OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF LABOUR COUNCILLORS:				
	100	97	100	100

Union secretaries were particularly effective as councillors because they were used to committee work, had experience of political manoeuvring, and were accustomed to dealing with businessmen (who dominated these councils) as equals. They were able to arrange their working days in order to attend to council business (many meetings were held during the day), which most workmen were unable to do. One handicap Ipswich Labour party suffered during this period was that a high proportion of its councillors (32% of the labourers) were railwaymen who were out of town during much of the week. Union officials were members of Trades Councils and were thus accustomed to working together; they were also aware of the importance of discipline and loyalty, and councillors were kept strictly in line by meetings held before the council sat. One Luton Labour councillor in 1938 described how the party gathered "before council meetings to discuss the proposals of the committees and plan ... criticism of them ... amendments and questions are arranged beforehand; in fact, everything is cut and dried."<sup>1</sup> Another councillor had been a Labour member of

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1. Luton News, March 10, 1938, p. 11, col. 7.

Newcastle Council (1928-1932) before he moved to Luton.<sup>1</sup>  
 Councillors who did not conform to the party line were expelled.

The advantages strong unions in the North brought were complemented in the South by the important role played by the Co-operative movement there. In proportion to population, the Southern Co-operative Societies were stronger than the one in Burnley<sup>2</sup>: in 1938, Ipswich Co-operative had one member for every 2.6 of the population, whilst that of Luton had one member for every 3.3 of the population in 1933. Burnley Co-operative had one member for every 5.2 of the population in 1927.<sup>3</sup> The Societies provided the main, if not the only link that many people had with the working class movement in the South, where unions were weaker and in some trades (such as the Luton hat workers) virtually non-existent. Like the unions, they brought local Labour parties finance and a certain amount of experience of organisation and political skill. They provided a much larger proportion of council candid<sup>a</sup>tes than did the Co-operatives in the North, which did not sponser any Labour council candidates in Burnley, and only one in Halifax (in 1919). In Ipswich and Luton, often as many as one-third of the Labour candidates stood on the Co-operative label: e.g. in the municipal elections of 1935, four out of 12 Labour candidates in Ipswich were sponsored by the Co-operatives, and two out of six in Luton.<sup>4</sup>

Two other contributory factors behind Labour's growth may be mentioned at this point. Firstly, Labour candidates worked very hard for the party's success. The party was new, it seemed to offer the possibility of radical change, it attracted recruits who contributed an almost religious fervour to the cause. Much of

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1. Luton News, October 31, 1935, p. 11, col. 4.

2. Figures of membership for Halifax Co-operative do not appear to be available.

3. Ipswich Co-operative Society, 1868-1968. A Century of Service. The Success Story of Ipswich Co-operative Society, p. 18.

Burnley News, January 1, 1927, p. 5, col. 2. Luton Industrial Co-operative Society, 75th Anniversary 1883-1958, p. 23.

4. Luton News, November 7, 1935, p. 13;

East Anglian Daily Times, November 2, 1935, p. 7, col. 1.

the enthusiasm that had formerly gone into Non-conformist revivals and Temperance crusades now came the way of the Labour party. One sign of this enthusiasm was the time and energy some men were prepared to devote to advancing the Labour cause. They were especially energetic in trying to get elected to councils. The persistence of some was formidable - a future Mayor of Ipswich, and a man who later became chairman of Burnley Education Committee<sup>1</sup> both fought six elections unsuccessfully. No Conservative or Liberal anywhere approached that total.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that Labour men were much more orientated towards the council than members of the other parties. When Councillor Leach of Halifax described his recreation as "local government" he spoke for many Labour councillors in all four towns.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 8.3: THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES CONTESTING TWO OR MORE ELECTIONS UNSUCCESSFULLY, 1919 - 1938.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
LABOUR	24	22	22	14
CONSERVATIVE	10	2	2	3
LIBERAL	-	3	2	1
INDEPENDENT	-	2	2	-

Secondly, the Labour party's policies everywhere were similar: it favoured extensions of municipal ownership, wanted an active slum clearance and rehousing policy, and demanded action to solve unemployment - much the same sort of programme in local as in national elections; and repetition must have had some effect in fixing the party policy in people's minds. The Labour party preferred prominent councillors for its parliamentary candidates.

1. A.V.Smith of Ipswich; G.Hale of Burnley.

2. The nearest were a Halifax Liberal (three unsuccessful contests) and an Ipswich Ratepayer (also three lost fights).

3. Who's Who in Local Government 1935, p. 236.

Dan Irving, M.P. for Burnley from 1918 to 1924, had had long experience on the local council. Cllr. Longbottom of Halifax, candidate from 1928 to 1935, and M.P. from 1928 to 1931, was one of the first Labour councillors to become a committee chairman. Cllr. Jackson of Ipswich, leader of the local Labour party, was candidate from 1922 to 1935, having sat in Parliament for the town from 1923 to 1924. The voters were thus usually fairly familiar with the party's candidates.

Thus it may be seen that Labour's growth was rapid, startling and permanent. It's success in attracting municipal votes was all the more impressive when it is remembered that only ratepayers were entitled to vote. It changed the political situation in all four towns; it forced the older parties into new alignments with one another; it obliged them to consider if and how they would bring the new-comer into local government. This question was answered significantly earlier in the North than in the South.

Although Labour's strength was very considerable by the early 1920's, the party found winning control of these boroughs very difficult. Pacts between the Conservatives and Liberals, their preponderance amongst the Aldermen (only in Halifax was Labour allotted its fair share of these positions) ensured that the older parties retained overall control for some years after they had ceased to win a majority of votes. In 1933, Burnley Labour party had 55% of the councillors, but only 17% of the Aldermen.<sup>1</sup> Ipswich Labour party, too, was discriminated against: in 1934, it had 41% of the councillors, and 17% of the Aldermen.<sup>2</sup> By 1938, Luton Labour party had 32% of the councillors, but not one Alderman.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in three of the towns, the possibility of Labour

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1. Burnley Express, July 5, 1933, p. 11.

2. Municipal Year Book, 1935, pp. 147 - 148.

3. Luton News, November 3, 1938, p. 7.



taking control was reduced by the older parties ensuring that Labour did not get its fair share of the Aldermen. When it too won control, Labour (in Burnley) operated a similar policy.<sup>1</sup> Although each side criticised the other for these tactics, they were not new to the interwar period. The Liberals and Conservatives had operated against one another in just the same way before 1914.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Aldermen were used to party advantage, the committee chairmanships, much more important positions from the point of view of the power they offered the holders, were distributed much more fairly, in the North at least. It was the ambition of taking on one of the major committees (Gas, Water, Electricity, Transport, Highways, Finance, Education and Housing) that drew many people to local government. In the North, Labour men were admitted to some of these positions before the party took control of the councils. They were not confined to minor chairmanships, but were elected to important ones. In Halifax, Labour men chaired two major committees (Education and Water) and nine minor ones. Councillor Taylor,<sup>3</sup> a trades union official, chaired the Education Committee from 1920, and Councillor Longbottom,<sup>4</sup> also a union official, was the Highways Committee Chairman from 1924. In Burnley, Labour councillors held four chairmanships before the party took control of the Council, two of which were important: Councillor Lees<sup>5</sup> chaired the Water Committee from 1925, and Cllr. Broadley<sup>6</sup> the Housing Committee from 1933. The former was a self-employed window cleaner, the latter was branch secretary of the T.G.W.U.

The comparative openness of Northern local government was

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1. Burnley Express, November 13, 1935, p. 6, col. 5.
  2. Burnley News, December 8, 1928, p. 9, col. 5.
  3. Halifax Courier, July 24, 1920, p. 8, col. 6.
  4. Who's Who 1930, p. 1897.
  5. Burnley News, September 24, 1927, p. 16, col. 1.
  6. Burnley Express, November 14, 1934, p. 8.

important because it is possible that one reason why there was so little social ferment at a time of acute depression was that Labour leaders had been taken into consultation and given a part in the administration. It may have been that this acceptance of Labour councillors was easier in the North because many were trade union officials and were already accepted as negotiators - links with the business-men who dominated the older parties already existed. In the Southern Labour parties, however, there were fewer union officials on councils - and so such contacts were rarer. The Southern Labour councillor had not had a chance to show how much power he could wield, as did Northerners, for example, during the General Strike.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps more important than any of these reasons, appointment of Labour men in the North may have been a form of insurance by the older parties in case Labour obtained control and dismissed all their chairmen. In view of the way the Aldermen were distributed, it was essential that the older parties demonstrate that as regards the committee chairmanships they were determined to be fair. The seriousness of the interwar economic crisis in addition encouraged them to recruit the Labour leadership to important positions in order to ensure that the Labour party shared in the responsibility for council actions. This policy obtained due reward. In Burnley, when it gained control, Labour did not operate a policy of "spoils to the victors" as regards the chairmen. One Conservative and five Liberal chairmen were re-elected to their positions by the Labour majority<sup>2</sup>, which demonstrated Labour's wish to operate through the system rather than radically to change it.

From which party did Labour draw most of its votes? Although

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1. Burnley Express, May 12, 1926; May 15, 1926, p. 12; May 19, 1926, p. 6.

A crowd estimated at 10,000 strong met in Halifax on May 9. Halifax Courier and Guardian, May 15, 1926, p. 5, col. 3.

On the first day of the strike in Ipswich only 3824 people were on strike. R.Pope and F.W.A.Skerritt, Ipswich and District Trades Council 1885-1967, pp. 17-18.

2. Burnley Express, November 14, 1934, p. 8.

both the older parties lost support to Labour, it seems clear that in three of these towns, on balance, the Liberals were the principal sufferers, though the strength of the attraction of Labour varied from town to town. Exact information is impossible to obtain, but a crude indication may be sought from the type of wards Labour was winning. Of the first ten gains Labour made in Halifax, during the interwar period (the last of them in 1928), seven came from the Liberals and only three from the Conservatives. The Liberals in Halifax were resilient and fought back hard, regaining three of the wards, but there could be no doubt that it was their seats rather than the Conservative ones which were most vulnerable to Labour attacks. In Ipswich, the Liberal party virtually collapsed under the Labour onslaught of the early 1920's. The Liberal party's strongholds in the town were two working class wards in the centre, which provided them with six councillors in 1919. Even with the Conservatives not offering any opposition, they had lost four seats to Labour by 1928, and the other two went in 1932.<sup>1</sup> Of the first ten Labour gains in Ipswich as a whole, only two came from the Conservative party.

Labour's early gains in Luton came from both the older parties: before the Conservatives and Liberals amalgamated in 1937, Labour took three seats from each.<sup>2</sup>

Burnley, however, presents a different picture to the other three towns. The Conservative party had derived a large measure of support before the Great War from working class wards, and it was these which were vulnerable in the early 1920's. Of the first twelve Labour gains, ten came from the Conservative party.<sup>3</sup> Special factors appear to have been in operation in this town. The

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, November 3, 1919, p. 8, col. 2; Ibid., November 2, 1932, p. 5, col. 1.

2. Luton News, November 8, 1934, p. 7, col.4; November 7, 1935, p. 13; November 5, 1936, p. 9.

3. Burnley Express, November 5, 1919, p. 4, col. 1; November 3, 1920, p. 6, col. 2; November 2, 1921, p. 8; November 4, 1922, p. 6; November 3, 1923, p. 15, col. 3; November 5, 1924, p. 2, col.1; November 3, 1926, p. 8, col. 2.

Liberal party was unpopular amongst many working class people because in Burnley it was strong in middle class areas, and had the support of many of the leading Burnley industrialists. The party's links with the Irish and its support for Irish Home Rule were further disadvantages because the Irish and their descendants were not popular in Burnley.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Conservative party had been vigorous in municipal terms, organisationally it was extremely active<sup>2</sup>, whilst the Church of England in Burnley had strong support amongst a section of the working class. Consequently, when the Labour party started to attract working class votes on a large scale, it was the Conservative party that was the most vulnerable.

The second major topic of this chapter is the fate of the Liberal party, which varied strikingly from North to South. In Burnley and Halifax the party survived as an independent entity to the end of the period; in Luton and Ipswich it had largely been absorbed by the Conservative party by the late 1930's.

TABLE 8.4: NUMBER OF LIBERAL COUNCILLORS RETURNED AT ELECTIONS; TOTAL NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS ELECTED IN BRACKETS.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1919	3 (12)	5 (15)	1 (10)	3 (6)
1923	6	7	5	3
1928	5	5	1	4 (7)
1933	3	7	0 (12)	5
1938	4	5	1	1 (9)

1. In the mid-nineteenth century, Roman Catholics in Burnley had had to go to church en masse for fear of assault if they went there alone. Burnley Express, August 17, 1929, p. 16, col. 4.

For Roman Catholics' links with Ireland, Burnley News, March 19, 1930, p. 7, col. 3.

2. Burnley Express, May 26, 1926, p. 4, col. 5.

The table demonstrates that whereas in the North the Liberal party was able to continue to get councillors elected throughout the period, in the South this was proving increasingly difficult, so that the party had to rely more and more on its strength amongst the Aldermen. However, the figures in the above table are to some extent artificial because many Liberal councillors were elected without Conservative competition. A better test of how far the Liberals held on to their electoral support can be gauged from a consideration of three cornered contests. These were limited in number because the older parties, with the exception of those in Halifax (and in Luton before 1931), were not prepared to risk splitting the anti-Labour vote. However, there were occasional instances of the carefully arranged pacts breaking down, and of three cornered fights taking place, which give an indication of how the Liberal party fared under the most difficult conditions. In Burnley, there were only four such contests during the entire period - testimony to the discipline of the older parties, and to their fear of Labour, a fear finding justification in the loss of three of the seats to the new party. But it was the Conservative party which fared worse, coming bottom of the poll in two of the elections.<sup>1</sup> The results are thus a very narrow sample, but they do demonstrate, that in some Burnley wards at least, Liberalism remained a strong electoral force.

The election results in Halifax show the pull the Liberal party retained in that town. There were 13 three-cornered fights, and nine of these were won by the Liberals. The Conservatives took three, and Labour only one. Between 1935 and 1938, there were four such contests, and the Liberals (who won three of them) polled

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1. Burnley Express, 5 November, 1919, p. 4, col. 1: Labour 997, Liberal 916, Conservative 369; Ibid., 2 November 1929, p. 18, col.1: Labour 1644, Liberal 1511, Conservative 1230; Ibid., 14 April, 1937, p. 8, col. 3: Liberal 1062, Conservative 955, Labour 894; Ibid., 3 November, 1937, p. 8: Labour 665, Conservative 373, Liberal 274.

3900 votes, the Conservatives 3430 and Labour 2886.<sup>1</sup> This was a better performance from the Liberals compared to earlier in the decade. In three four-cornered contests between 1932 and 1934, the Liberals (3244) votes led Labour(3012) whilst the Conservatives trailed behind with 2708 votes.<sup>2</sup>

The situation in Ipswich was very different. There were only three three-cornered contests, and the Liberal party did not succeed in winning any of them.<sup>3</sup> Further evidence is available in Ipswich to demonstrate how badly the Liberals were faring. Ipswich wards returned two councillors at each election, and often, the older parties ran candidates in harness. There were 31 such occasions between 1919 and 1938, and the Liberal polled higher than the Conservative in only two of them. On four occasions the Conservative was elected whilst the Liberal was defeated.

In Luton, the Liberals were able to win three cornered contests during the 1920's, but against a rising tide of Labour opposition. In eight three-cornered fights between 1924 and 1926, the Liberals won four.<sup>4</sup> They averaged 812 votes, compared to 714 for the Conservatives, and 351 for Labour. Of four three-cornered contests between 1929 and 1930 (the last to be fought in the town during the interwar period), the Liberals won three, but their average vote had fallen to 561, compared to 536 for the Conservatives, and 533 for Labour.<sup>5</sup>

Why did the Liberal parties in the North fare better than those in the South? Firstly, the parties in Burnley and Halifax benefited from having substantial middle class support, whereas Luton and Ipswich Liberal parties had relied very much on their

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1. Halifax Courier and Guardian, November 2, 1935, p. 9; November 6, 1937, p. 9; Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, November 2, 1938, p. 7.

2. *Ibid.*, November 1, 1933, p. 5; November 1, 1934, p. 12; November 2, 1934, p. 3.

3. R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 39; Vol. IV, pp. 28, 41.

4. Luton News, November 6, 1924, p. 14; November 5, 1925, p. 9; November 4, 1926, p. 16.

5. *Ibid.*, November 7, 1929, p. 4, col. 4; November 4, 1930, p. 12, col. 3.

working class wards, and when these swung to Labour, the parties were fatally weakened. In Burnley three of the four wards with large numbers of middle class voters had been Liberal before the First World War, and when the older parties made an electoral pact, the Liberals obtained the wards in which the middle class were strongest. The Conservatives made occasional attempts to dislodge the Liberals from these wards, but always unsuccessfully.<sup>1</sup> In Halifax also, the Liberals were well entrenched in middle class wards. Frequently, Labour did not put up candidates in these areas, and the Conservatives and Liberals fought for the seats. That voters had a decided preference for one party, can be illustrated by comparing the experience of two Halifax wards between 1931 and 1936. Skircoat had traditionally returned Liberal councillors. In the years mentioned above, the Conservatives made three attempts to dislodge the Liberals, and were defeated every time. The Liberal party endeavoured in 1935 and 1936 to penetrate the Conservative stronghold of Illingworth, and on both occasions they were defeated. The Liberal position in Halifax was further strengthened because the party was still able to win enough votes in working class wards to enable it to defeat Labour councillors in bad years for Labour. Two such wards in Halifax (Ovenden and West) alternated remarkably between the two parties:

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
OVENDEN	L	Lab	L	Lab	L	L	Lab	L	Lab	L
WEST	Lab	L	L	C	Lab	L	Lab	L	Lab	Lab

(L = Liberal; Lab = Labour; C = Conservative)

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1. E.g. Healey Wood Ward, 1936: Liberal 1373, Conservative 1054, Communist 393, Burnley Express, November 4, 1936, p. 8, col. 2.

It is important to distinguish the situation in local elections from that in General Elections. In the latter, people were increasingly afraid of wasting votes and tended to vote for or against Governments, a situation which worked to the advantage of the Conservative and Labour parties. No Liberal sat for Burnley or Ipswich in Parliament during the interwar period, and the last Liberal to be elected in Halifax was the Speaker, Whitley, who resigned in 1928. The party survived longer in Luton. The successful candidate in 1929 was Leslie Burgin, but he stood as a Liberal National in 1931, without opposition from the Conservatives, and during the 1930's he accepted office in the National Government.

Local elections, however, were in one sense a luxury; the issue to be decided was not the crucial one of a General Election - many voters felt that it was safe to prefer the Liberal party to the Conservatives. Various traditional attitudes helped to preserve Liberalism more strongly in the North: many active Liberals were also active Non-conformists; the party was a vigorous advocate of civic improvement and benefited from strong feelings of local pride - many of the achievements of Northern councils had been the work of Liberal councillors; Conservatism had not managed to sink deep roots into the middle class, and especially not the Non-conformist middle class. Of greater importance, however, than any of these, was the continued vigour of Northern Liberalism, its persistent willingness of innovate, try new policies, and the commitment of its leading members to taking up positions of responsibility, which maintained its support during this period;

The Liberal links with Non-conformity remained close in the North.

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**TABLE 8.5: THE LIBERAL PARTY AND THE NON-CONFORMIST CHURCHES:**  
**(A): PERCENTAGE OF LIBERAL COUNCILLORS WHOSE RELIGION IS RECORDED WHO WERE -**

	<u>NON-CONFORMISTS</u>	<u>ANGLICAN</u>
BURNLEY	100%	0%
HALIFAX	92%	8%
IPSWICH	57%	43%
LUTON	69%	31%

**(B): THE ABOVE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF LIBERAL COUNCILLORS**

BURNLEY	41%
HALIFAX	53%
IPSWICH	32%
LUTON	52%

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In the South, as the table shows, a substantial proportion of the Liberals were Anglicans. The Northern middle class Non-conformists were clear as to which of the older parties was the Non-conformist party. This was not apparent in the South, and especially in Luton where the Conservative councillors whose religion is known divided into four Anglicans and four Non-conformists.<sup>1</sup> In the North, the Conservative party remained the party of the Church of England, as far as its councillors were concerned. In Burnley, out of 16 councillors for whom information is available<sup>2</sup> 13 were Anglican. The old pre-war divide between Liberals and Conservatives, which was partly based on the rivalry between Non-conformist and Anglican, survived much longer into the post-war period in the North, than it did in the South.

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1. 27% of the total number of Conservative councillors, 1919-1938.  
 2. 33% of the total number of Conservative councillors, 1919-1938.

In the North, working class chapelgoers may have inclined increasingly to the Labour party, which contained many Non-conformists amongst its councillors. Of those whose religion is recorded, the proportion who were Non-conformist was 60% in Burnley, 80% in Halifax, and 55% in Ipswich.<sup>1</sup> The only Luton Labour councillor whose religion is recorded was a Quaker.

Many people in the Northern middle class strongly disliked the Labour party, but were also very critical of the policies of Conservative Governments. For these, Liberalism represented an attractive alternative. Liberals might sink their differences with the Conservative party at moments of acute crisis - for example, in the election of 1931 - but for most of the period, many Liberals in both Burnley and Halifax were as hostile to the Conservative as to the Labour party. Their criticism stemmed mainly from their dislike of Conservative economic policies. They disliked not only that party's protectionism, but also what they considered to be its inclination to prefer the interests of the City over those of industry, during the decade after the end of the First World War. Many of them were impressed by the arguments put forward in the Liberal campaign of the late 1920's. The influence of Keynes's views is apparent in many of the criticisms industrialists made about the trend of events during this decade. For example, Alderman Grey, a Liberal cotton millowner of Burnley, blamed the "rapid deflation ... and fixing the pound sterling at full parity with the dollar in order to re-establish Great Britain as the financial centre of the world" for Britain's economic problems. "Too little consideration" he maintained "was given to the exporting

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1. Number whose religion is known as a percentage of the total number of Labour councillors elected during the interwar period: Burnley 36%, Halifax 27%, Ipswich 30%.

industries."<sup>1</sup> Liberal dissatisfaction persisted through the 1930's: P.N.Whitley, a leading Liberal on Halifax Council, argued in 1935 that there were still valid reasons for voting Liberal - the persistence of unemployment, opposition to the economic nationalism that produced the tariff policies of the National Government, and the failure to find solutions to the international problems of the 1930's.<sup>2</sup> Liberalism thus combined for many people in the North the attractions of a radical foreign policy with reforming policies at home that nevertheless avoided what were feared to be the extremities of Socialism.

Finally, the Liberals in the North remained an active municipal force. Many of their achievements have been described above. The skilful financial management of chairmen like Grey, Clay and Whittaker, all Liberals, enabled resources to be available for many of the innovations of the 1920's and 1930's. The Liberals in Halifax were the initiators of the large-scale employment of the workless. Liberal Health Committee Chairmen in both Burnley and Halifax pioneered the taking-over and modernisation of the poor-law hospitals. P.N.Whitley, Chairman of Halifax Education Committee, pushed through the plans for the new technical college, whilst A.Pickles, also a Liberal chairman, was responsible for the vigorous housing programme of the late 1930's. These and many similar achievements ensured large votes for Liberals in municipal elections. In the South, on the contrary, it became increasingly difficult to recognise a specific Liberal contribution to local government. Prominent Liberals were no longer known as such. In Ipswich, where the strength of the Labour challenge made itself felt early, the Conservatives and Liberals stood under one label, the "Constitutionals",

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1. Burnley News, March 22, 1930, p. 6, col. 5.

2. Halifax Courier and Guardian, October 26, 1935, p. 11, col. 4.

as early as 1926. The pressure for alliance here came from the Liberals. The problem for them was that by abandoning their individuality, it became impossible for voters to distinguish them from their Conservative colleagues. One of the leaders of the latter group, the brewer P.W.Cobbold, said that in municipal politics, his party continued to work with its Liberal friends: "They had the same opponents, and if their municipal policies were not identical it would take a clever man to see the difference."<sup>1</sup> If Cobbold found the divergences so slight, it was unlikely that many voters would notice them at all. Liberal achievements on Ipswich Council would not be recognised as such.

In Luton, the Liberal party abandoned its identity in the mid-1930's. There was a danger from 1933 onwards (when Labour for the first time secured the highest municipal poll: 2441 compared to 2349 for the Liberals and 1880 for the Conservatives<sup>2</sup>) that splitting the right wing votes would let Labour in. The parties proceeded to complete amalgamation in 1937, though well before the formal alliance was set up, the town's Liberal National M.P., Burgin, was pressing hard for the association of the two parties. One local Conservative, referring to the extent to which Burgin had identified himself with the National Government, wondered "how an out-and-out Free-trader could do the work he had done. ... How he is going to get back into the Liberal fold ... I don't know."<sup>3</sup> In the General Election of 1935, Burgin dropped the Liberal part of his political label.

Amalgamation of the older parties in the South was facilitated by a combination of factors. Firstly, many people could no longer see the need for the continued existence of an independent

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, January 29, 1923, p. 10, col. 4.

2. Luton News, November 2, 1933, p. 10.

3. Ibid., February 22, 1934, p. 6, col. 5.

Liberal party. The Liberals in the South no longer represented any distinct class or religious interest, as they continued to do in the North. The party was unable to capitalise on middle class dissent from Government policies, as it did in Burnley and Halifax. The middle class were comparatively contented in the South, whereas the working class, many of whom were deeply discontented, turned increasingly to Labour. Liberals in the South tended to parrot Conservative demands for low rates and municipal economy;<sup>1</sup> even before they amalgamated, the Liberals had few original policies to offer. They were also unfortunate in being poorly led. There were no Liberals in Luton or Ipswich of the calibre of Grey or Whitley, whose political skills ensured that the Liberals fared at least as well as the Conservatives when it came to the distribution of chairmanships or the introduction of fresh policies into the Council.

The quality of local government suffered where the Liberal party disappeared. The Liberals made an important and distinctive contribution at this time: much more than the Conservatives, they were the party of civic pride and they attracted many who were anxious to participate in municipal administration. The possibility of initiating improvement nationally was increasingly denied to Liberals because of the decline of the party - it was becoming prohibitively hard for the Liberals to win seats in Parliament, so Liberals with political ambitions were forced to abandon them or turn to local government, where the chairmanship of the important committees offered challenge and excitement to the amateur politician. The result was that in the North especially, Liberals held a disproportionately large number of the major chairmanships.

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1. E.g. Luton News, October 29, 1936, p. 12.

East Anglian Daily Times, October 30, 1929, p. 12.

TABLE 8.6: LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLORS AND CHAIRMEN<sup>1</sup>  
COMPARED, 1919-1938.

<u>A) THE LIBERAL PARTY</u>	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
% OF COUNCILLORS <sup>2</sup>	48	60	23	48
% OF CHAIRMEN	73	71	50	66
<u>B) THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY</u>				
% OF COUNCILLORS	52	40	77	52
% OF CHAIRMEN	27	29	50	34

The table shows that in all four towns the Liberals held a higher proportion of chairmanships than they did of the total number of Conservative and Liberal councillors. The main reason for this in the North was that businessmen tended to be chosen as chairmen, particularly of the trading committees, and the Liberal party was the one most businessmen joined. They were impelled to join the Liberals because of their Non-conformity (all the industrialists in the Liberal columns in Table 8.6 in Halifax and Burnley were Free Churchmen), their dislike of Conservative economic policies - particularly in the 1920's, and the fact that the Liberal party was traditionally the one that got things done in local government. In the South, the position was different. Ipswich businessmen were mainly Conservatives (only one of the seven biggest businessmen in Ipswich was a Liberal), and several did not take up chairmanships. Luton Council had few members who could equal the wealth of the businessmen in the other towns. Straw hat manufacturers, who were the only businessmen of significance on the Council, and who took on chairmanships, divided politically into six Liberals and three Conservatives.

1. I.e. Chairmen of the Gas, Electricity, Water, Tramways, Highways, Health, Housing, Finance, and Education Committees.
2. Percentage of the total number of Liberal and Conservative councillors.

The decline of a Liberal party could therefore have serious consequences for the quality of local government. Liberals were very active on councils, and certainly in the North, men such as Whittaker, Pickles, or Grey might well have failed to enter local government if the Liberal party had not existed. Local government was more competent in the North not only because of the challenge of the times, but also because it was able to continue to tap an important source of talent that was becoming lost to the Southern councils.

The experience of the Conservative party during this period was chequered.

TABLE 8.7: NUMBER OF CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLORS ELECTED.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1919	2 (12)	4 (15)	5 (10)	1 (6)
1923	4	5	5	1
1928	3	6	4	2 (7)
1933	2	4	6 (12)	1
1938	7	6	5	4 (9)

The strength of the Conservative party in Ipswich, and its comparative weakness in Burnley and Luton (at least before 1938) is apparent from the Table. In some years, the Conservatives in Burnley failed entirely to get any councillors elected (1932, 1935), whilst in Halifax, the number elected occasionally fell to almost derisory proportions: 1920 - three, 1924 - three, 1927 - two, 1930 - three. On only two occasions (1930 and 1938) did the Burnley Conservative party win over half the wards in the town, and this was an achievement never matched by the party in Halifax.

1. Total number of councillors in brackets.

Ipswich Conservatives, however, frequently came near to total victory: they won eight out of ten seats in 1921, and 1924, and ten out of 12 in 1930 and 1936. Nonetheless, there were two reasons for the Conservatives feeling considerable satisfaction with the overall position of the party at the end of the period. Firstly, it is clear from Table 8.7 that in Burnley and Luton in particular, the local Conservative parties were building up strength in the late 1930's. The difficult years of the period - bad results associated with the trough of the depression in the early 1930's, when the Conservative party was in power nationally - had been survived. It is likely that the impact of the National Government's policies (particularly its handling of foreign affairs) helped the party in 1938, but other factors were also very important. The Conservative party was the one most often in power at Westminster, and although this might damage local parties at times, at others it brought them credit. The bad times were survived in part because the party had a very impressive organisational structure. It everywhere endeavoured to recruit working class people and trades unionists: for example, the Halifax Unionist-Labour Association claimed in 1921 to have members from 15 different trades unions.<sup>1</sup> Social organisations for both women and children were vigorously promoted, as for example in one working class ward in Ipswich, where parties were given for children which combined discussion of "the aims and objects of 'The Young Britons'" with presents to each child of "a bag containing sweets, nuts, and an orange, and also an envelope containing a shilling."<sup>2</sup> The party could rely on substantial financial support from the rich, particularly as the challenge from

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1. Halifax Courier, March 19, 1921, p. 8, col. 4.

Burnley Express, May 26, 1926, p. 4, col. 5.

2. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, January 27, 1928, p. 7, col. 4.



Labour grew. In the words of one of them, "Socialism ... is now a real danger, and it can only be effectively resisted by a strong, energetic Conservative Association."<sup>1</sup>

A major asset the Conservatives possessed which enabled them to face and surmount the problems caused by the depression in the 1930's was the able leadership of men such as Gledhill in Halifax and Parkinson in Burnley, who knew that the only way for the party to prosper was for it actively to promote reforming policies. Hence the adoption by Burnley Conservative party of such slogans as "money spent on education is money well spent."<sup>2</sup> In Burnley, Parkinson played a major part in supporting the New Industries Programme - he was a member of the committee of three in charge of it, and his support ensured that Conservative opposition was kept to a minimum.

In the South, Conservative policies were much less radical. It is difficult to imagine the Northern parties reacting to a Labour campaign, such as that against malnutrition in Ipswich by arguing that it was a non-issue, "a Socialist 'Red Herring'".<sup>3</sup> Campaigns were pivoted much more in the South round warnings that "Socialism is the First Step to Communism"<sup>4</sup> and on a determination to keep the rates low.<sup>5</sup> In accordance with this, Conservative and Liberal-controlled councils in the South delayed as long as possible building up expenditure on social services like education in the 1930's. It was the middle class there that was dissatisfied with extra spending on schooling and council housing, feeling that it did not benefit from either, and Conservative parties increasingly reflected these views.

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1. Sir Walter Kent. Luton News, October 15, 1936, p. 13, col. 6.

2. Burnley Express, October 26, 1935, p. 20, col. 2.

3. East Anglian Daily Times, October 29, 1936, p. 9, col. 2.

4. Luton News, October 29, 1936, p. 1.

5. East Anglian Daily Times, October 30, 1929, p. 12; October 31, 1935, p. 7, col. 6.

Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, October 21, 1921, p. 4.

At this point, it is proposed to examine the changes that were taking place in the membership of councils in terms of occupations, and the inclusion in them of women and the retired. These were of long term significance in terms of the calibre of councillors recruited and therefore in the ability with which councils were administered.

Before the First World War, businessmen had played an important part in local government. Promotion to chairmanships could be rapid for these men, who were felt to have the necessary abilities and experience to direct large concerns. For example, Sir F. Whitley-Thomson was elected Mayor<sup>of</sup> Halifax in 1908 only one month after joining the Council, a vacancy having been specially created for him.<sup>1</sup> A cotton millowner secured the chairmanship of the Gas Committee after only three years on the Council, when, at 36, he was one of the youngest councillors in Burnley.<sup>2</sup> A Halifax worsted manufacturer was appointed Chairman of the Water Committee after only one year on the Council.<sup>3</sup> After the war, however, businessmen councillors everywhere declined in numbers. In Burnley, the proportion of cotton manufacturers on the Council fell from 23% to 8% between 1921 and 1938, probably as a result of the cotton depression. The difficulties of the textile industry also played a major part in bringing about a drop in the percentage of textile manufacturers on Halifax Council from 15 in 1921 to 8 in 1938. At the same time, industrialists in comparatively buoyant industries such as engineering and brewing in Ipswich also failed to maintain a large number of council members, the proportion falling from 20% to 6% between 1921 and 1938. The owners and managers of the new industries in Luton

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1. Halifax Courier and Guardian, June 27, 1925, p. 6, col. 4.

2. Burnley Express, August 8, 1925, p. 15.

3. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 4, 1928, p. 7, col. 6.

showed no interest in the activities of the Council: not one of them joined it to make up for the decline in the proportion of straw hat manufacturers from 33% (1921) to 19% (1938).

Various factors were responsible for this uniform decline, in prosperous as in troubled industries. Before 1914 working class councillors had been small handfuls, but during the interwar period they took up to and above a third of the representation. With the rise of Labour, there were other competitors for the important positions on councils. Many Labour members might resemble Cllr. Walters of Halifax whose "voice [was] seldom heard in the council chamber"<sup>1</sup> during his 24 years membership, but they expected their share of the perquisites, and there was always the danger that the Labour party would win a majority and turn all the chairmen out. Secondly, council work consumed a considerable amount of time, and the pressure was increasing steadily. One Halifax textile manufacturer (who remained on the Council) was called to 150 meetings a year on council work in 1930.<sup>2</sup> The rewards were slight - mainly in the form of prestige, and perhaps eventually, inclusion in an honours list. The situation was not that men resigned from the council in order to devote more time to the business, but that younger manufacturers were not being recruited in sufficient numbers to make good the loss through retirements. The business depression of the period may have caused many young industrialists to feel that they could not afford the luxury of council membership. However, the business men in the newer prosperous industries - clothing manufacture and domestic utensils in Burnley, light engineering and confectionary in Halifax, consumer durables in Ipswich and Luton, also declined to give up time and energy to

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1. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 4, 1928, p. 7, col. 6.

2. Ibid., October 11, 1930, p. 7, col. 1.

councils. Not one person from these industries entered Burnley, Ipswich or Luton councils, and only 7% of Halifax Council members were entrepreneurs in light engineering and confectionary in 1938.

In part this development may have reflected a growing belief amongst these men that councils no longer counted for as much as they once did in terms of power and influence. Decisions were increasingly taken at Westminster, and local authorities were subject to growing Government interference. Council work also became more onerous as transport improvements enabled manufacturers to live further away from the towns where they worked, whilst the old practice of taking up council work on retirement (which was often quite early in a manufacturer's middle age if he had prospered) declined as many chose to retire to the country or the seaside. One councillor complained that "Halifax was badly hit by many men who had been in business here trotting off to Harrogate and other places when they retired."<sup>1</sup> Council work became less attractive as it became less certain that entry would be followed by election to a chairmanship or to the Mayoralty, and election itself was no longer so certain because the rise of the Labour party meant that more seats were contested.

Although businessmen became less numerous on councils as the years passed, the middle class as a proportion did not decline significantly, because the professional groups were growing in size.

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1. Halifax Courier, January 22, 1921, p. 2, col. 5.

TABLE 8.8: PERCENTAGE OF COUNCILLORS WHO WERE IN THE PROFESSIONS.<sup>1</sup>  
1919-1938.

	<u>1921</u>	<u>1938</u>
IPSWICH	20%	30%
LUTON	5 (1 man)	10 (3 men)
BURNLEY	15	8
HALIFAX	6	12

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Thus there were increases in three of the towns; the decline in Burnley was partly the result of the large increase in the number of Labour councillors. The growth of this group reflects firstly the expansion of the professional groups as a whole in Britain at this time, and secondly the increasing specialisation of municipal affairs. Medical practitioners often had firm views on how the health services should develop; teachers wished to influence educational policy; civil servants believed themselves to be well qualified to know how local government should be run, etc., and these groups were determined to influence policy. With the industrialists showing less interest in local politics, opportunities arose for energetic members of other groups, and the older political parties tended to prefer professional people as candidates for councils to the other main group who were interested in local politics, the shopkeepers and small businessmen.

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1. I.e. stock brokers, civil servants, architects, solicitors, barristers, doctors, graduates, teachers, clergy, journalists, accountants.

TABLE 8.9: PERCENTAGE OF COUNCILLORS WHO WERE SMALL BUSINESSMEN  
AND SHOPKEEPERS<sup>1</sup>

	<u>1921</u>	<u>1938</u>
BURNLEY	23	16
HALIFAX	23	30
IPSWICH	25	20
LUTON	25	27

Thus, no clear pattern emerges in the strength of this group which declined in Burnley and Ipswich and increased in Halifax and Luton. The buoyancy of the retail trades during this period does not appear to have influenced too strongly the representation of shopkeepers. The group provided very few committee chairmen. Between 1919 and 1938, five members of this group became chairmen in Burnley, four in Halifax, three in Ipswich and four in Luton. There were several reasons for this. Dominant members of councils tended to mistrust the ability of shopkeepers to chair a committee, feeling that they had insufficient experience of handling large spending organisations. Secondly, these people tended to see themselves principally as watchdogs of council expenditure, not as initiators of policy. Finally, many of them did not have sufficient time to take a chairmanship.

Two groups which participated more in local government at this time were women, and the retired. In Burnley, Ipswich, and Luton, the first women to stand for the council were candidates of the Labour party (in Halifax, there was a representative of the National Council of Women). Labour was thus the first party

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1. I.e. chemist, underclothing manufacturer, grocer, milliner, decorator, estate agent, carriage tailor, shoemaker, garage proprietor, furniture dealer, plumber, outfitter, newsagent, builder, boot manufacturer, tailor, coal merchant, wine merchant, hosier. "Merchants" are not included in the table.

to break down the prejudice against women in local government, though its lead was quickly followed. By 1939, all four councils contained women members: 5% of the total number of councillors elected during the interwar period in Burnley, 1% in Halifax, 9% in Ipswich and 4% in Luton. Very few of these women, however, were chosen for important positions - mistrust of their abilities remained strong for much of the period. Only very formidable women, who were highly qualified, were able to achieve chairmanships. Miss M. Jefferies (Conservative), a descendant of one of the founders of the engineering firm of Ransomes, Sims, and Jefferies, and a science graduate of London University, became Chairman of Ipswich P.A.C. in 1930, having previously been Chairman of the Board of Guardians from 1922.<sup>1</sup> The career of the most successful woman councillor in Halifax followed a similar pattern. Mrs. Lightowler, also a Conservative,<sup>2</sup> had been Chairman of the Board of Guardians from 1928, held the corresponding office in the P.A.C. from 1931, and became the first lady Mayor of Halifax in 1934. The similarity in the chairmanships these women held suggests that the male majority believed that women were best suited to the social services committees, and the only woman to become a chairman in Burnley was elected to that of the Public Health Committee.

However, after 1930, there were signs that councils were being opened up much more to women candidates. Six of Burnley's eight women councillors were elected after 1935, whilst seven of Ipswich's 11 were elected after 1930. There were two reasons for this. Women like Miss Jefferies and Mrs. Lightowler were proving their ability on committees, and demonstrating that they

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1. Contact. The Ipswich Conservative Magazine, May-June 1955, pp. 3 - 5.

2. Halifax Courier, July 24, 1920, p. 8, col. 6.

were as competent at management as the men. Secondly, women were very willing to come forward as candidates, whereas men and especially businessmen were becoming more reluctant to give up time to council work. Most women could arrange to go to council meetings during the day, and they suffered no financial loss by committing themselves to council work.

The second factor also applied to the retired. It is difficult to be sure of the exact number of councillors who were retired, because some entered councils when they were still working, and retired later. The table below includes only councillors who were retired when first elected.

TABLE 8.10: PERCENTAGE OF COUNCIL WHO WERE RETIRED WHEN FIRST ELECTED.

	<u>1921-1924</u>	<u>1935-1938</u>
BURNLEY	2.5	7
HALIFAX	2.5	7
IPSWICH	7.0	29
LUTON	0.0	8

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Thus the number of councillors who were retired on first election increased over the period, but only in Ipswich did it become a substantial proportion. It was useful to have some members of councils who had experience of the problems of the ageing and pensioners, but an overweighting of these groups might have tended to slow down the pace at which councils came to decisions, and their willingness to accept change. Ipswich Council was certainly less adventurous in the late 1930's than it had been in the early 1920's.

Before concluding this discussion of local government, it is

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necessary to add a brief note about magistrates and mayors. It has been argued here that a high quality of local government depended on the early inclusion of members of strongly supported new parties in positions of responsibility, and that it was especially important that those positions which were not directly elective should be seen to be open to the working class.

By 1930, Halifax, Burnley and Ipswich had all had Labour mayors.<sup>1</sup> Luton did not have one during this period, but the party was not established as a political force till the mid 1930's. The older parties accepted the candidates Labour nominated for mayor and were satisfied with the unbiased manner in which they performed their duties. Labour mayors were scrupulously constitutional in the way they carried out their responsibilities (especially the chairing of council meetings) and made it clear that working men could exercise these functions as dispassionately as members of the older parties.

A great deal of mystery surrounded the bodies which chose Justices of the Peace. For example, in Halifax there was "an Advisory Committee, composed of magistrates" which drew up lists for submission to the Lord Chancellor "who ... has the power to act quite independently of any recommendation."<sup>2</sup> However, it would be fair to say that the bodies who chose magistrates were in touch with the needs of these towns. By 1926, Burnley had ten<sup>3</sup> Labour J.P's, and by 1928, Halifax had eight.<sup>4</sup> Several of these had been appointed before the Great War. Luton's first Labour J.P. had been appointed in 1918, and had been joined by two others by 1939.<sup>5</sup> Ipswich had three Labour J.P's by 1920.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly political activity was no guarantee of competence on

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1. The first Labour mayors were Cllr. Lees, Burnley, 1927-28; Cllr. Longbottom, Halifax, 1922-23; Cllr. Clouting, Ipswich, 1929-30.

2. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 4, 1928, p. 6, col. 1.

3. Burnley News, February 8, 1928, p. 6.

4. Halifax Courier and Guardian, February 4, 1928, p. 7, col. 6.

5. The Luton News' Directory of Luton, 1939, pp. xvii - xix.

6. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, July 23, 1920, p. 4, col. 5.

the bench, and the comments of the Burnley News, that "it would be difficult to say precisely what public - as apart from party - service some of our Justices have ever rendered"<sup>1</sup> applied to some J.P's in all four towns. On the other hand it was important that all social classes should be represented and that people appearing before the magistrates should not feel that they were being tried by their "betters".

A council remained a sensitive body in proportion to the extent to which it kept in touch with the various strands of opinion, pressure groups, and social organisations in the town. In the North, the part played by the network of clubs and societies in knitting together the social fabric was particularly important. Many councillors had links with these organisations, and considerable numbers had at one time or other held office in them as presidents, secretaries, or committee members. Such organisations were stronger in the North and more people were members of them in proportion to the total size of the population than was the case in the South. Table 8.11 below compares the number of clubs in Ipswich and Halifax in the late 1930's and shows the wider spread of club activities in the Northern town.

TABLE 8.11: CLUBS IN HALIFAX AND IPSWICH<sup>2</sup> 1938-1939.

	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>
CHARITABLE, LITERARY & RELIGIOUS	143	67
POLITICAL	15	17
BRASS BANDS	14	0
TRADE AND PROFESSIONAL	55	61
SPORTS	59	37

1. Burnley News, April 2, 1927, p. 9, col. 5.

2. "Halifax Courier and Guardian" Historical Almanack, 1938, pp.189 - 235.

Kelly's Directory of Ipswich and Neighbourhood, 1939, pp. A52 - A59.

The wider spread and greater strength of social organisations in the North applied to most sectors of society. Trades Unions were stronger there, and so were the political parties, which were organised on a ward basis, and were renowned for their social activities, such as Daneshouse Ward Labour Women's trips to the seaside, and Briercliffe Liberals' excursions into the country. Such organisations played a part, not only in creating an active social life, but also in preserving political loyalties. The Southern political parties were backward in this respect - for example, Ipswich Labour party did not start annual outings till 1928.<sup>1</sup>

Sports clubs were also more numerous in the North. All sorts of organisations fielded football teams: for example, in Burnley, both the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. had teams, as did most of the churches, the textile mills and engineering workshops, the Junior Unionists, the Irish - both Catholic and Protestant, and the Corporation Departments.<sup>2</sup> As the slump deepened, the unemployed of a street or district also produced a team. The enormous spread of such activities - often games were played during the week as well as at the weekend - meant that for the physically active much of the boredom and frustration of unemployment was channelled into harmless pursuits.

The contribution clubs made towards binding together the social framework was considerable. The middle and working classes were brought into closer contact, particularly through the sports clubs and the Non-conformist churches. Clubs acted as counter-balancing forces to the isolation that was apt to develop in a man's life if he lost his job. They could also function as media for the

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1. R.Ratcliffe, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 60.

2. Burnley News, April 28, 1928, p. 2; May 2, 1928, p. 2.

Halifax football clubs: Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 24, 1922, p. 3, col. 3.

Ipswich football clubs: East Anglian Daily Times, January 9, 1922, p. 7, col. 5.

dispersal of financial assistance - many societies benefitted from the generosity of rich members. Finally, club membership brought councillors into touch with many strands of social life in the Northern towns, and kept councils in contact with many segments of public opinion.

A brief summary of the contacts councillors had with social and religious organisations in the four towns is provided in Table 8.12. The details are taken from biographies and notes about councillors published in the local presses, which usually gave the principal interests councillors had. Only organisations in which councillors took an active role have been included.

TABLE 8.12: ORGANISATIONS GIVEN AS THE PRINCIPAL INTERESTS OF COUNCILLORS.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
NATIONAL SOCIETIES	2	2	8	0
TERRITORIAL ARMY	0	0	6	0
ROTARY	2	6	4	2
FREEMASONS	6	13	9	1
NON-CONFORMIST CHURCHES	25	44	6	12
TEMPERANCE	3	6	4	3
GOLF CLUBS	3	6	2	5
OTHER SPORTS	3	10	4	8
CHURCH OF ENGLAND	9	9	15	4
MUSICAL CLUBS	4	6	1	1
SOCIALIST & RADICAL CLUBS	7	5	3	0
TRADES UNIONS	20	15	11	4
CO-OPERATIVES	4	3	4	3
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	2	2	6	1
ALL OTHER LOCAL CLUBS	7	8	3	5
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF LOCAL CLUBS</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS WITH BIOGRAPHIES RECORDED</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>THE ABOVE AS A % OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS ELECTED DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD:</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>57</b>

Thus more branches of local life in the North were in contact with the councils through secretaries, treasurers, lay preachers, sidesmen etc. The large number of contacts provided through the unions and the Non-conformist churches in the North is particularly striking. Although the Non-conformist churches were in numerical decline during this period, the fervour of active Non-conformists remained undiminished, and they continued to play a very energetic role in local politics via the Liberal and Labour parties. The large number of active Free Church connexions with councils in the North suggests that there may have been a strong relationship between the Non-conformist conception of duty and the Gospel of Civic Pride. Non-conformists played a part in local government disproportionate to their numbers.

This network of clubs and societies played the vital role of putting councillors in touch with many strands of public opinion, and it enabled them to keep up to date with what people were thinking. It is possible to detect several instances of this. For example, in Burnley, it is difficult to explain the change in the attitude of the political parties, and especially Labour, to education, in any other way. As more and more working class people saw a good education as a way of increasing employability, so did the Council respond. The active participation of the leader of Burnley Conservative party in the New Industries Programme, the harsh criticisms he made about the views of those members of his party who publicly disagreed with it,<sup>1</sup> must be attributed, at least in part, to his knowledge of the popularity of the programme in the town. Sharp changes in pricing policy on the transport system in Ipswich, and to a lesser extent in Burnley,

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1. The leader of them left the Conservative party and joined the Liberals. He was the only councillor to change his party in Burnley during this period. Burnley Express, October 27, 1937, p. 8, cols. 1 - 2.

were brought about because many councillors had been made aware of how strongly people felt about high fares. A council's sensitivity to public opinion was stimulated by a wide variety of social contacts which its members maintained. The limited number of these in Luton played a part in explaining why the Council was so slow in providing adequate social services in the 1930's. Many councillors were not aware till too late of the strength of feeling of many electors about the failings of the maternity home, the paucity of hospital places, and the shortage of council houses.

The political influence of the clubs was greater in proportion to the size of their membership. During the interwar period, many clubs and societies disappeared,<sup>1</sup> a development that some blamed on the depression. It is probable, however, that more important reasons for the decline were the new distractions of the interwar period: cinema-going and listening to the radio. As far as the churches are concerned, the changes in support may be measured, though there are difficulties in interpreting the statistics. The principal source of evidence lies in figures produced by priests and ministers themselves - there was no census of religious affiliation at this time. There is a danger that these figures may not be absolutely accurate because of a possible reluctance by a minister to remove the names of people who had ceased to attend chapel, particularly when the general trend was downwards. Anglican priests might have been tempted to exaggerate the number of Easter Communicants in order to prevent unfavourable comparisons with previous incumbents. Consequently, the figures in the tables below in all probability represent no more than approximations, but they do give an indication of the general

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1. E.g. Burnley Express, June 25, 1938, p. 11, col. 7.

trend, which is the principal object here.

TABLE 8.13: A) MEMBERSHIP OF THE BAPTIST & CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	2435	3492	2735	2050
1938	1902	2895	2898	2008

B) THE ABOVE EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION.<sup>2</sup>

1921	2.36	3.5	3.4	3.6
1938	2.23	2.9	2.9	2.0

Thus, the Baptist and Congregational churches declined as proportions of the population, though in Ipswich, there was a slight numerical increase. Church closure undoubtedly had some effect on this: Halifax lost one Congregational and one Baptist chapel, Ipswich and Luton a Baptist chapel apiece.<sup>1</sup> There was a tendency for people, if the church or chapel they had traditionally attended closed, to cease church going altogether, and these closures undoubtedly had an impact on the figures. But more serious was the failure to open new chapels on the housing estates: only Luton Baptists did so, and that not until 1937.<sup>3</sup> This meant that they were failing to cater for the large population movements of the period - Luton received over 30,000 migrants between 1921 and 1939, many of them from areas in which Non-conformity was traditionally strong, yet there was a numerical decline in church membership. This is also apparent in the figures for the Methodist churches. Unfortunately, the reunion makes comparisons very difficult, so Table 8.14 compares the situation in 1932 to that in 1938.

1. The Baptist Handbook for 1921, pp. 41 - 109.

Ibid., 1938, pp. 57 - 151.

The Congregational Year Book, 1921, pp. 125-271.

Ibid., 1938, pp. 303-453.

2. Census 1921, County Tables, Table 3.

National Register, 1939, Table I.

3. Baptist Handbook, 1938, p. 58.

TABLE 8.14: A) NUMBER OF MEMBERS, METHODIST CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1932	2992	4634	1922	3077
1938	2297	4366	2137	3103

B) THE ABOVE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION.<sup>2</sup>

1932	3.0	4.7	2.4	5.4
1938	2.7	4.5	2.1	3.1

The Methodists thus suffered from decline in proportion to the population as a whole, though in the South, there were small numerical increases in membership. The causes of stagnation in the support for this church were probably much the same as those which caused the problems of the Baptists and Congregationalists. The figures for church membership as a proportion of the population are underestimates because junior membership is not included - the purpose of the table was to examine how far adults, who were free to stay or leave the church, maintained their membership. If junior members are included, to obtain a picture of what proportion of the population as a whole was in touch with the main Non-conformist churches, then the following situation emerges:

TABLE 8.15: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN 1938 WHO WERE ADULT AND JUNIOR MEMBERS OF THE BAPTIST, CONGREGATIONAL, AND METHODIST CHURCHES.<sup>3</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
NUMBER	6,399	9,645	7,998	7,328
PERCENTAGE	7.5	10	8	7.3

1. The Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church held in London July 1933, pp. 459 - 494.

The Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church held in Hull July 1938, pp. 370-391.

2. Census 1931; National Register 1939, Table I.

3. National Register 1939, Table I.



It is not possible to make a comparison with 1921 because figures do not appear to exist for the Wesleyan Methodist church in 1921. The most striking fact to emerge from these figures is the absence of any marked regional distinction in the support of the principal Non-conformist churches - these were as strong in the South as in the North. There is no way of testing how many were activists - people who devoted a lot of time and effort to the churches, and whose Non-conformity may have had a strong political side which emerged in support for the Liberal party.

It is much more difficult to obtain a picture of the situation as it affected the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church - neither, as regards attendance at church, kept good books. It is possible to arrive at only a partial picture of Anglican church attendance. Figures have been obtained from incumbents of the numbers taking Easter Communion in 1921 and 1938. These are generally accepted as a measure of the number in communion with the church, but they give no indication of the number actually attending services. There could have been a rise in communicants over the period, yet a decline in the number of worshippers. On the other hand, increased willingness to take communion denotes a desire for a closer connection with the church. Figures have been obtained from eight churches in Burnley (out of 12); 12 in Halifax (out of 21); four out of seven in Luton, and seven out of 18 in Ipswich (in 1938).

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TABLE 8.16: NUMBER OF EASTER COMMUNICANTS, 1921 COMPARED TO 1938.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	2244	2926	1146	994
1938	2631	3284	1751	1129
% CHANGE	+ 17.2	+ 12.2	-	+ 13.6

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One qualification to the table must be made: in Burnley, Halifax, and Luton, the same churches are included in both 1921 and 1938, but the Ipswich figures include three new churches in 1938, and so do not give an accurate indication of the change in communicants. It is clear, however, that as far as three of the towns were concerned, the Church of England did not face the same problem as the Non-conformist churches. The general trend in the North, with figures for half the churches available, was decisively up, despite the population decline in the 1930's. This may be an indication that the church was very strong amongst the middle-class and the better-off sections of the population, just as the decline amongst the Non-conformists may reflect the fact that these churches tended to be comparatively strong amongst the working class, many of whom were migrating during this period. It would be useful here to compare how far the number of Roman Catholics altered during this period, as Roman Catholicism was also particularly strong amongst the working class, but figures exist only for the Northern towns during this period. Although there are no statistics for the number of Roman Catholics in the South, it is unlikely that their absence substantially alters the conclusion drawn below that the proportion in touch with the churches was very much higher in the North than the South.

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TABLE 8.17: APPROXIMATE PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHURCHES, 1938.

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
ROMAN CATHOLIC	13,100 <sup>1</sup>	10,000 <sup>2</sup>	N.A.	N.A.
NON-CONFORMIST	6,399	9,645	7,998	7,328
CHURCH OF ENGLAND	2,631	3,284	1,751	1,129
ABOVE AS % OF POPULATION <sup>3</sup>	26	23.7	10	8.4

In addition to offering spiritual comfort, the churches provided vigorous social organisations, and were often the vehicle for the provision of charity. Politically they were an important stabilising element in these societies, and especially in the North. The Roman Catholic church in particular felt able to direct the political inclinations of its people. An example from Burnley illustrates this. A local priest, criticising some of the provisions of the 1930 Education Bill, warned the town's Labour M.P.: "I have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Henderson received up to 9,000 Catholic votes which put him in his present position, and I want him personally and the Labour Party in Burnley to know where those 9,000 votes will go [without] a change in that Bill' ... he gave no promise of the Catholic vote ... until he knew what they were going to do."<sup>4</sup>

The Church of England was much less sure about the extent of its influence, and one of its priests lamented "how little the great conscience of the church, and how little the ministers themselves, really account in the affairs of the town."<sup>5</sup> He may have been too pessimistic. There is considerable evidence, apart from communion figures, to suggest that the loyalties the Church

1. Burnley Express, August 17, 1929, p. 16, col. 4.

2. Halifax Courier, June 7, 1919, p. 3, col. 3.

3. National Register, 1939, Table I.

4. Burnley News, December 24, 1930, p. 16, col. 1.

5. *Ibid.*, September 4, 1926, p. 7, col. 3.

could still call upon were considerable. Even in depressed Burnley the Churches were able to obtain substantial financial support, and not only from rich benefactors. For example, a confident appeal for £30,000 was made in 1928 to rebuild a burnt down Anglo-Catholic church.<sup>1</sup> In Halifax, in 1920, the Sunday School collections on one Sunday for the Non-conformist and Anglican churches totalled £2,923.<sup>2</sup> Between 1926 and 1930, various churches in Burnley received bequests totalling £8,600.<sup>3</sup> Although much of this money was intended for and was used on structural alterations, some of it provided assistance for the unemployed and under-employed "amongst the active workers of these churches."<sup>4</sup>

The Non-conformists were the most vigorous pressure group at the local level, and they also exerted influence in parliamentary elections. For example, in 1924 in Burnley, the Labour and Liberal candidates both appealed for Temperance support, which was said to be worth "thousands of votes".<sup>5</sup> In 1935, the Burnley Express described the decision of the Free Church council to support the Labour candidate in the general election of that year as a major factor in his victory because it "influenced a very considerable section of Non-conformist votes."<sup>6</sup> In local politics, Non-conformists had greater impact in the North than they did in the South. There were two main areas in which they were interested, over which councils had control, and which can be examined to compare the degree of influence they had: Sunday observance, and the giving of licenses to public houses.

Sunday games were disallowed in Burnley parks throughout the period. This issue was debated twice: in 1938 and 1939. On the first occasion the council divided 19 - 15 against the games; on the second 23 - 16 against. Both Liberals and Labour were split

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1. Burnley News, January 14, 1928, p.12, col.1.

2. Halifax Courier, September 25, 1920, p. 5, col. 6.

3. Burnley News, July 9, 1927, p. 7, col. 5; July 23, 1927, p. 12, col. 2; June 23, 1928, p. 16, col. 4; December 6, 1930, p. 16, col. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, December 6, 1930, p. 16, col. 4.

5. Burnley Express, October 15, 1924, p. 7, col. 2.

6. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1935, p. 11, col. 6.

on this question, though the divisions amongst Labour councillors were greater than those amongst the Liberals.<sup>1</sup>

The Non-conformist pressure groups were less successful in other areas. Although they stopped the establishment of public houses on the housing estates in Burnley, they were not able to prevent the opening of an off-license on one of them, as has been described above.

In Halifax, the Non-conformists exerted considerable pressure against the opening of new public houses and in favour of the preservation of the Sabbath. A Primitive Methodist chaired the Licensing Committee, about which the Halifax Courier and Guardian wrote "the position is not an enviable one, for the occupant has often to announce decisions which are unpalatable to large bodies of citizens. But Mr. J. Brearley has never shrunk from the task."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, between 1903 and 1918, 41 public houses were closed, and 12 more between 1918 and 1926.<sup>3</sup> The Council was persuaded to maintain its restrictions on the opening of the principal park on Sundays. The town's Liberal party was united on this issue, whereas Labour and the Conservatives were divided.<sup>4</sup>

In the Southern towns, the position was very different. The Non-conformists were not able to prevent the opening of public houses on Ipswich estates. The Chairman of Luton Licensing Justices for much of the period was a Conservative, and the endeavours of the Free Church Council and the Temperance Federation to prevent drinking facilities being opened on the estates were defeated.<sup>5</sup> The proposal to allow Sunday games in Luton parks passed almost by default: although 11 councillors voted against the proposal, none of them had the temerity to speak against it.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Speaking in favour of games in the parks on Sundays: 5 Labour councillors; against them: 3 Labour councillors. The Liberal vote was not recorded. Burnley Express, February 5, 1938, p. 18. In favour of Sunday games: 14 Labour, 1 Liberal; against: 4 Labour, 9 Liberals, 7 Conservatives. Burnley Express, February 4, 1939, p. 14.

2. Halifax Courier and Guardian, January 29, 1927, p. 6, col. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, December 11, 1926, p. 12, col. 5.

4. For opening the park: 11 Labour, 4 Conservatives; against 2 Labour, 10 Conservatives, 20 Liberals. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, October 7, 1926, p. 7.

5. E.g. Luton News, February 4, 1937, p. 6, col. 3.

6. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1936, p. 13, cols. 6 - 7.

In view of the absence of a regional gap in the proportion of the population who were Non-conformists, why were Northern Free Churchmen more successful in exerting pressure than Southern ones? Firstly, the continued survival of large Liberal parties in the North meant that Non-conformists were well represented on councils, and had a strong political vehicle. Although not in a majority, they were usually able to rely on the support of people of other religious beliefs who sympathised with Non-conformist fears about the desecration of the Sabbath and the expansion of the drink trade. It was also the case that Northern Non-conformists were more vigorous in promoting their views than their Southern counterparts: the silence of the Free Churchmen on Luton Council when Sunday games was debated is significant. Northern self-confidence may have been based on the knowledge (derived from social contacts) that there was a great deal of public support for a strong stand on these issues. Finally, some councillors argued that the North had an essential function vis-à-vis the rest of the country, which was to "take a stand on principle and show that the North could set an example ... the South to-day was given over very largely to Sunday non-observance, and ... Burnley would set a standard for the South."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the churches retained considerable political influence at this time on issues that they regarded as important. Yet, despite the evidence that they were still able to draw on considerable public support, some church leaders were pessimistic about the future: "Since the war there has been a widespread spirit of unrest, and churches have found many difficulties confronting them."<sup>2</sup> They frequently made prophecies of religious revivals,

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1. Burnley Express, February 5, 1938, p. 18, col. 3.

2. Halifax Courier and Guardian, January 14, 1928, p. 6, col. 2.

but when these did not materialise, their despondency was all the greater. There appear to have been three main reasons for the gloom many ministers and clergy felt about the situation of the churches during this period. Firstly, there had been a sharp loss of members, caused by events before this period began, and which were to have reverberating effects till its end. This was the "fact that men who served in the Army are stated to be largely missing from the churches."<sup>1</sup> The same phenomenon was noted in Burnley, where there was "general disappointment amongst clergy and ministers of all denominations at the non-attendance of returned men at public worship."<sup>2</sup> The shaking of religious belief caused by the war was followed by the experience of the depression. To judge from the statistics that are available, this did not cause a decline in Anglicanism, but it may have had some impact on the strength of Non-conformity in the North. Where it did cause a change, and one that might have been depressing to many ministers, was in the splendour of public demonstrations of religious belief. There were frequent comments in newspapers about the decline of religious spectacle, though the photographs that appeared of Whitsuntide walks and church parades look impressive to the present-day reader, and demonstrate that a great deal of effort and money was still devoted to such activities. One example of the contemporary view appeared in the Burnley Express in 1925: the processions were "a ghost of their former selves, although brave attempts are made to bring them up to something like pre-war standard. Both in numbers and spectacular effect there is a falling off ... the old enthusiasms and rivalries amongst the various sections of processionists have almost vanished."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the impact of the

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1. Halifax Courier and Guardian, January 14, 1928, p. 6, col.2.

2. Burnley Express, April 26, 1919, p. 7, col. 4.

3. Ibid., June 3, 1925, p. 4, col. 7.

depression combined with a decline in sectarian hostilities to debilitate the grandeur of processions. If this meant that "common folks" who were unable "to dress 'posh enough' for church"<sup>1</sup> and church parades now felt the 'inferiority' of poverty less, then this development was not wholly to be deplored.

Thirdly, and most important, the migrations of the interwar period hit the churches hard. Not only were people making the long trek from North to South, but migrants - often the better off - were moving from town centres to suburbs, especially in the South. The impact was felt disproportionately hard by the churches because many buildings had been erected in the middle fifty years of the 19th century in central parts of towns that were now rapidly decaying so that a large number of churches were feeling the loss of support at the same time. Optimistic ministers in the suburbs were greatly outnumbered by their pessimistic brethren in town centres. The range of support and the contrast in views about church support it generated may be illustrated by comparing church membership in 1921 and 1938. One Burnley Congregational church (Westgate) had 199 members in 1921, but only 80 in 1938.<sup>2</sup> Church membership at Stannary Congregational chapel in Halifax dropped over the same period from 503 to 290.<sup>2</sup> Churches in suburban areas, however, often enjoyed dramatic increases in support. Tacket Street Congregational chapel in Ipswich increased its membership from 283 in 1921 to 500 in 1938.<sup>2</sup> However, if a church or chapel did not already exist in a suburban area, it often took so long to build one that by the time the place of worship was ready, the habit of attendance on the part of many migrants might well have been lost.

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1. Letter to E.D. Smithies from the Revd. John Finch, St. Matthew's Parish, Burnley, 3 April 1970.

2. Congregational Year Book, 1921, pp. 125-279; 1938, pp. 303-452.



Finally, the contribution of the provincial presses to interest in local government must be considered. All the principal newspapers published in these towns devoted some space to municipal politics and personalities. Council meetings received close attention, and in Burnley, Halifax, and Luton verbatim reports of the proceedings were often printed. Newspapers were also an important stimulant of interest in the history of these towns; the supplements that were published frequently to commemorate some new industrial or municipal venture or local anniversary were often historical in character, concerned to trace in considerable detail the origins of, for example, the carpet industry in Halifax, or the cotton industry in Burnley. It is difficult to say how far the regional contrast in interest in municipal affairs that has been noted in this chapter was encouraged by the varying degrees of attention given to local politics by the newspapers. It is true that those published in the Northern towns were more preoccupied with town affairs than those in the South. In Ipswich, the East Anglian Daily Times was concerned primarily with national news, and the Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury with news about the county - neither gave much attention to current municipal debate apart from their reports of council proceedings. The Luton News gave fuller treatment to council meetings, and editorials were occasionally devoted to comment upon municipal problems - these were rarely the concern of the editor of the East Anglian Daily Times - but there was much less material provided in the Luton News about council personalities and about important groups in the town such as the trades unions, the more important local businessmen, the magistrates, the clergy, etc. It is in this respect that the

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Northern newspapers are richer. All such groups received attention - often very enlightening and instructive in character - from the Burnley Express, the Burnley News, and the Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian. Although the Halifax paper resembled the East Anglian Daily Times in attempting to give full coverage to international and national news, there is a striking contrast in the reporting of local news between the two papers. Prominent personalities associated with the Corporation are figures of great interest to the Halifax as to the Burnley papers. In the East Anglian Daily Times, and the Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury these tend to receive attention only on election as Mayor or upon retirement or death - and even then, their association with the Council might not be noted. For example, when one Ipswich councillor retired in 1932, after 11 years membership of the Council, the Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, whilst noting that he was a man of "diversified interests",<sup>1</sup> did not add that being a councillor was one of these. Such an omission on the part of a Northern newspaper would have been unthinkable.

The Northern press carried its interest in local politics into such areas as the weekly competitions. For example, the Burnley News ran one of these in 1931 which invited readers to identify the back view of a prominent local citizen. On one occasion, amongst the people suggested by competitors were three Burnley aldermen,<sup>2</sup> and on another, a councillor was identified successfully by "several hundred" competitors.<sup>3</sup> In Halifax, the Halifax Courier endeavoured to stimulate the interest of children in the Council by essay competitions with such titles as "What I thought of Mayor's Day".<sup>4</sup> None of the Southern newspapers offered any similar

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1. Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, March 4, 1932, p. 9, col. 5.

2. Burnley News, January 24, 1931, p. 3, col. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, February 14, 1931, p. 5.

4. Halifax Courier, November 13, 1920, p. 7, col. 4.

efforts during this period.

It is difficult to be certain how far the greater interest on the part of the Northern press in municipal life was a response to the curiosity felt by the newspapers' readers, or whether it was didactic in purpose - designed to stimulate such interest. Probably the two processes went together - editors knew the readership was interested in the council and its members, and sought to satisfy such interest in their reporting in such a way that the appetite of readers was stimulated further. It is possible that the difference in the amount of reporting from North to South - pieces on the council and its members and their interests much less frequent in the East Anglian Daily Times, the Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, and the Luton News, than in the Northern newspapers, reflects the awareness the editors possessed - in the South, that people were not very interested in local politics, and that therefore, the number of columns devoted to this subject should be comparatively few;- in the North, that the opposite situation prevailed. Certainly, there is ample evidence in the North that civic pride was stronger -this reveals itself still in conversation with people in these towns. Whether this pride involved reading reports in local newspapers about council meetings is impossible to know, but that Northerners were sufficiently interested in the outcome of local elections to want to vote in greater numbers than did the Southerners can be demonstrated from an examination of the polling figures.

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TABLE 8.18: PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE VOTING: AVERAGE OF 1919-21 COMPARED TO AVERAGE OF 1936-38.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1919-21	64	52	48	39
1936-38	70	57	53	37

The table also shows that in three of the towns, approximately half the electorate voted, and that in the same three, there was a rise in voting over the period. The figures for Luton between 1919 and 1921 are exceptional, being considerably higher than for the rest of the 1920's. They were stimulated by the greater political activity in the town which followed the riots of 1919. If typical later years are compared with the figures for 1936 to 1938, there was a rise in interest: there was a 25% poll in the elections of 1932, and one of 31% in 1933.<sup>2</sup>

The figures for the Northern towns conceal the intense activity that occurred in many wards. If these are examined, it can be seen that there was often a remarkable degree of public interest. In Halifax in 1936, a contest in which all three main political parties put forward candidates achieved a poll of 68%. In the same year fights between Liberals and Conservatives in two other wards produced polls of 71% and 70%. In Halifax Northowram, a year earlier, the remarkable poll of 77% was obtained, when Liberal and Conservative candidates contested the ward. This ward showed high polls in other years. In 1937, there was a poll of 64% and in 1938 of 64%.<sup>1</sup> Polls well above 60% were not unusual in

1. Burnley Express, November 5, 1919, p.4, col. 1; November 3, 1920, p. 6, col. 3; November 2, 1921, p. 8; November 4, 1936, p. 8; November 3, 1937, p. 8; November 2, 1938, p. 8.

Halifax Courier, November 8, 1919, p. 8; November 6, 1920, p. 3, col. 4; November 5, 1921, p. 3; Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, November 3, 1936, p. 8; November 2, 1938, p. 7; Halifax Courier and Guardian, November 6, 1937, p. 9.

East Anglian Daily Times, November 3, 1919, p. 8; November 3, 1936, p. 14; November 2, 1937, p. 11; November 2, 1938, p. 12; Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury, November 5, 1920, p. 5; November 4, 1921, p. 10.

Luton News, November 4, 1920, p. 5; November 3, 1921, p. 11; November 5, 1936, p. 9; November 4, 1937, p. 13; November 3, 1938, p. 7.

2. Luton News, November 3, 1932, p.9; November 2, 1933, p. 10.

Halifax.

In Burnley, even higher polls - over 80%, were occasionally achieved. In the municipal elections of 1925, out of ten wards contested, polls over 70% were realised in eight of them, whilst in one ward (Trinity), 80.5% of the electorate voted.<sup>1</sup> In the 1930's, these high levels of interest were maintained. In 1936, for example, eight out of 11 contested wards had polls of over 70%.<sup>2</sup> One contest, involving the town's longest serving woman councillor, Mrs. Brown, produced a vote of 80%, an achievement that was nearly matched the following year when all three parties contested St. Paul's ward, and 75% of the electorate voted. In that year, all the contests produced polls of over 70%.<sup>3</sup>

Ipswich could not show any wards voting on this kind of scale, but good polls, producing votes of over 60%, were shown when the interest of the public was engaged, either by interesting candidates, or important issues. A.S. Stokes, brother of the town's Labour M.P., stood for Bridge ward in 1938, and the poll rose to nearly 62%, having averaged 55% in the two preceding years.<sup>4</sup> In the previous year, a tightly fought contest in St. Clement's ward, involving all three main parties, produced a 55% poll. The Liberal, as so often happened in Ipswich, lost his seat, whereas the leading Conservative held his, and polled over 300 votes more than the other Conservative candidate.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, many elections secured only a poor response, and in the same year, two of the five wards contested polled under 40%, not unusually low polls for Ipswich during this period.

Public interest in elections in Luton was much less than in the other towns, though even here, if the electorate's enthusiasm was raised, a high poll could ensue. Although 35% was a large

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1. Burnley Express, November 4, 1925, p. 8, col. 1.

2. Ibid., November 4, 1936, p. 8.

3. Burnley, Year Book, 1937-38, pp. 331 - 333.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, November 3, 1936, p. 14; November 2, 1937, p. 11, col. 1; November 2, 1938, p. 12, col. 1.

5. Ibid., November 2, 1937, p. 11, col. 2.

turnout in this town, and in 1937, one ward polled 29% and another under 25%,<sup>1</sup> an interesting situation, such as was presented by a strong Labour party challenge, brought out the voters. In 1938, close fights between the National and Labour parties in Dallow and South wards, obtained over 50% polls.<sup>2</sup> These were amongst the highest secured in Luton at any time during the interwar period, and testify to the impact on public interest a vigorous party rivalry in municipal politics could produce.

Several contributory reasons for this high degree of popular interest in local elections have been suggested above, but it does appear that there was a relationship between the extent to which a municipality exercised control over local affairs, and the degree of interest the electorate showed in elections. Burnley Council was extremely active during this period, and particularly during the mid-1930's, when it played a major role in turning the local economy round. Voting was correspondingly high. At the other extreme, Luton Council exercised only partial control over the town's affairs, and voting was correspondingly low, though during the mid-1930's, as the town grew fast, demands were made, particularly by the Labour Party, that the Council take up a more vigorous role, and public interest increased.

The extension of the functions councils performed during this period contributed to the general rise in turnout in elections. At the start, they levied the rates, they controlled the price of electricity ( and in the North, gas ), they decided the level of tram fares - all matters of immediate interest to every voter. By the end of it, they administered major hospitals - and decided the charges (if any) for treatment therein; they determined

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1. Luton News, November 4, 1937, p. 13, col. 8.

2. Ibid., November 3, 1938, p. 7.

how many secondary school places should be free; and they controlled the rents of a rapidly rising proportion of the town's housing. Only poor relief had been largely taken out of their hands. In Burnley and Halifax, the corporations had at various times been instrumental in providing jobs. As the influence councils exercised over the lives of people in these towns increased, so also did popular interest in elections, in the qualifications and policies of candidates, and in the proposals of the political parties on rates, rents, pricing of transport and power etc.

The greater the authority a council had over the services of the borough, the stronger became the public interest. By contrast, the post-1945 period, which has seen many of these powers removed from local control, has seen a corresponding decline in the interest the electorate has shown in municipal politics.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Between 1956 and 1958, an average of 52% voted in Burnley compared to 46% in Halifax, 44% in Luton, and 36% in Ipswich, in contested elections. Moser and Scott, op. cit., pp. 112-147.

In 1970, 43.8% of the Burnley municipal electorate voted, compared to 40.2% of that in Luton. Burnley Express, May 8, 1970, p. 1; Luton News, May 14, 1970, p. 3.

CHAPTER NINETHE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE PUBLIC UTILITIES.

This chapter examines the public utilities owned by the local authorities. Two of these - electricity and transport - were important growth industries during this period, and enable a study to be made of the success municipalities had in managing trading companies. As councils were in control, the major policy decisions affecting transport and electricity were decided publicly, so that it is possible to test how local politicians and the parties reacted to the problems of the utilities, where opposition to change lay, and how strong it was in the two regions. In view of the faster economic growth in the South, it is useful to compare on a regional basis how far the municipal trading departments were prepared to experiment and innovate. Finally, a study of the trading companies enables an enquiry to be made into the relationship between councillors and salaried officials.

The comparisons that can be made are, however, restricted in two ways. Firstly, the Northerners municipalised on a larger scale than did the Southerners. In 1918, Burnley and Halifax councils controlled Gas, Electricity, Transport, Markets, Slaughterhouses and Water, whereas Luton Council controlled Electricity, Transport<sup>1</sup>, and Markets, and Ipswich Council, Electricity, Transport and Water. This in itself represents an interesting regional contrast, demonstrating the greater commitment on the part of the Northern councils to municipal control, but it also restricts the comparisons that can be made to two main areas: transport and electricity. Of these a wider consideration will be given to transport. In the supply of electricity, the Government increasingly interfered,

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1. Luton tramways were temporarily leased to a private concern in 1918.



and in the final analysis, imposed its own solution to the difficulties of this industry. Transport remained a major problem area for the local authorities - sooner or later, the trams had to be replaced by buses, an expensive process, but at the same time, public interest in fares limited the extent to which the councils could solve their financial difficulties by changes in pricing policy. This dilemma proved very hard to resolve, and in it, the councils received little direct help from the Government.

Table 9.1 shows the main changes that took place in the supply of electricity during this period. Because Burnley and Halifax councils controlled the gas companies, these are also included for purposes of comparison.

TABLE 9.1: ELECTRICITY AND GAS SUPPLY COMPARED - NUMBER OF CONSUMERS.<sup>1</sup>

<u>GAS</u>	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1921	29,296	31,517	18,417	15,378
1938	32,839	32,900	34,385	29,040
% CHANGE	<del>████</del> +12.0	<del>████</del> +4.4	+87	+90
<u>ELECTRICITY</u>				
1921	3,000	4,231	2,491	2,554
1938	25,480	24,621	26,539 <sup>2</sup>	35,722
% CHANGE	+749	+485	+962	+1276

The table demonstrates the extent to which electricity was a growth industry at this time, and also shows the problem this growth posed for the gas companies. In the South, there was sufficient population and industrial expansion for the privately owned gas companies to develop - and the similarity of their rates of growth is interesting, as is the parallel stagnation of both Northern gas companies. The Northern councils decided to encourage

1. Electricity: The Municipal Year Book of the United Kingdom for 1922, pp. 498-500; 1939, pp. 196-202.

Gas: "The Gas World" Directory 1921, pp. 87-102; The Gas World Year Book. 1938, pp. 262-292.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, June 22, 1939, p. 5, col. 3.

the expansion of electricity, particularly in areas of new housing, and the growth of gas was further slowed down because many of the slum areas that were being demolished had used gas for fuel and light.<sup>1</sup> Some Northern councillors advocated writing off gas entirely,<sup>2</sup> but councils were not prepared to contemplate such an idea. The expansion of the Northern gas companies was in fact partly hindered by the fact that they were municipally owned and as a result were prevented from competing freely in the open market with electricity.<sup>3</sup> This protection of electricity may have been vital to build the industry up - and there were many fears expressed about the impact on the electricity industry of the abolition of the trams<sup>4</sup> which encouraged councils to compensate the electricity departments as far as possible - but the viability of the gas departments was threatened as a result. Towns of this size were too small to support separate municipally owned gas and electricity companies. The situation in the South was more favourable: although gas companies frequently complained about the preferential treatment councils gave to their electricity departments, in fact gas companies were much freer to compete with electricity for industrial and private customers.

However, despite the concentration of resources on electricity in the North, councils found the task of raising enough money to bring electricity stations up to date extremely hard, and the cost of modernisation was rising all the time. Between 1923 and 1937, the municipalities spent the following amounts on their

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1. Burnley Express, June 27, 1936, p. 20, col. 3.  
Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, May 5, 1938, p. 7, col. 2.
  2. One Halifax Labour councillor complained that other councillors had given the impression to the public at large that Gas was 'done'.  
Ibid., May 5, 1938, p. 7, col. 2.
  3. For example, Halifax Gas Department was forbidden to supply light to council houses, although houses in the slums being demolished had used gas. It was also proving very difficult to persuade council departments to use gas. Ibid, May 5, 1938, p. 7, col. 2.
  4. E.g. Burnley Express, May 9, 1931, p. 4; Halifax Daily Courier Guardian, January 9, 1936, p. 5.

power companies:

TABLE 9.2A GAS AND ELECTRICITY: LOCAL AUTHORITIES' CAPITAL EXPENDITURE<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
ELECTRICITY	£382,971	£1,149,604	£1,045,932	£1,058,952
GAS	<u>378,029</u>	<u>196,373</u>		
TOTALS	761,000	1,345,977		

The table shows that whereas Halifax, Ipswich and Luton spent approximately the same amounts on electricity, Burnley council spent very much less. The Council endeavoured to maintain both its services, but as the period proceeded, it became apparent that it was impossible to do so, and after 1930, there was a change in the direction of spending.

TABLE 9.2B: CAPITAL EXPENDITURE BY TRADING COMPANIES: DIVIDED BY PERIOD<sup>1</sup>

<u>GAS</u>	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1923-1929	£281,168	£ 83,169		
1930-1937	96,861	113,204		
<u>ELECTRICITY</u>				
1923-1929	113,434	555,132	386,262	358,486
1930-1937	269,537	594,472	659,670	700,466

Whereas in the 1920's, Burnley Council had given preference to gas, in the 1930's, more resources were concentrated on electricity. In this, the pattern in Burnley was coming to resemble that in Halifax, where the Council had built up electricity from the early 1920's. Much smaller demand from industrial users in Burnley

1. Luton, Accounts, 1924-1937; Ministry of Health, Taxation Returns, 1923-37, Part II, Table IV.

compared to the other towns explains part of the contrast in expenditure on the electricity departments, but not all of it. Burnley Council was finding it difficult to raise the large sums needed to develop modern power stations. In this respect, its experience preceded that of the other towns, who all had to face, by the end of the period, the fact that the electricity industry had grown too large for municipal control. Halifax Council was able to keep pace with the Southern councils because it neglected its gas company, and the effect this had on the Gas Department's efficiency is apparent when the concern's profitability in the late 1930's is considered.

TABLE 9.3: CAPITAL OUTLAY AND TRADING SURPLUSES COMPARED, 1923-1938.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>GAS</u>		<u>ELECTRICITY</u>	
	<u>OUTLAY</u>	<u>SURPLUS</u>	<u>OUTLAY</u>	<u>SURPLUS</u>
<u>BURNLEY</u>				
1923	£439,103	+28,979	330,104	+21,800
1938	887,770	+10,333	876,790	+ 4,383
<u>HALIFAX</u>				
1923	£698,975	+29,924	618,337	+27,069
1938	758,157	- 3,527	1,585,956	+34,810
<u>IPSWICH</u>				
1923			£297,969	+10,801
1938			1,325,236	+33,249 <sup>2</sup>
<u>LUTON</u>				
1923			£310,072	+11,215
1938			1,576,734	+13,836

1. Electricity: Municipal Year, 1939, pp. 196-202; Garcke's Manual, 1938-39, p. 515.

Gas: Municipal Year, 1939, pp. 218-220; 1924, pp. 579-581; pp. 555-560.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, June 23, 1938, p. 9, col. 2.

It is apparent from the figures produced by the trading companies that most of them were barely making a profit, despite the vast sums of money that had been invested in them. The derisory size of the surpluses in the late 1930's are typical of the situation then. The Electricity and Gas companies suffered from the difficulties traditionally associated with industries in which there was a plethora of small companies: they were too small to produce enough current to obtain satisfactory economies of scale. Expensive new equipment was not being fully utilised. In the North especially, although the number of consumers grew almost as fast as in the South, industrial demand was stagnating with the result that the number of units sold was far inferior.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF UNITS OF ELECTRICITY SOLD (MILLIONS).<sup>1</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u>
1924	7.8	19.8	5.8	12.2
1934	15.4	41.2	34.1	71.05
1938	24.1	59.8	N.A.	126.7

The advantage to Luton electricity department of a rapidly growing industrial sector is apparent from the table, and compares strikingly with the situation in the Northern towns. Growth in the North was inhibited because at the start of the period, councils were antagonistic to the pooling of resources that might have secured such economies. For example, a proposal in 1923 that Blackburn, Preston and Burnley join to set up a major power station to produce electricity was rejected by Burnley Council, and this rejection caused the scheme to fail.<sup>2</sup> There were protests at the time from the more far-seeing councillors that "the production of electricity was not a parochial business",<sup>2</sup> an attitude that the experience

1. Municipal Year, 1924, pp. 579-581; 1935, pp.856-859; 1939, pp. 196-202. N.A. = not available.  
 2. Burnley Express, December 5, 1925, p. 5.

of the interwar period was greatly to strengthen.

This process was facilitated as the power trading companies increasingly failed to fulfill one of their traditional functions, which was to contribute a proportion of their profits for the relief of the rates. A sharp turn-round in the situation had been brought about by the First World War when for four years these concerns were not properly maintained, servicing was inadequately performed, and insufficient money was spent on repairs. Hence, Ipswich Electricity Department, for example, lost nearly £8,000 in 1918-19.<sup>1</sup> Profitability was temporarily restored by the mid-1920's: by 1927-28 the profit of Burnley Electricity Department was £24,990, whilst that of the Ipswich Department was £19,766.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter returns gradually diminished: in 1938, Burnley Electricity made only £4,383 profit. The Luton Department which had produced a surplus of £54,780 in 1934 managed only £13,836 in 1938.<sup>3</sup> And this was despite the substantial capital investment of the 1930's. At the same time as this process was continuing and the amount councils could expect these departments to contribute to relieve the rates was declining, the chairmen of the relevant committees were growing increasingly reluctant to see the profits raided. Money taken to relieve the rates could have been spent on repairs and the improvement of machinery. Chairmen fought very hard to protect their departments' profits. The fate they suffered may be illustrated by reference to one of the most tenacious chairmen, Alderman Waddington, a Liberal and Chairman of Halifax Gas Committee, who had on occasion some success in meeting the interference of the Council in his department. For example, in 1926 he successfully defeated a proposal to raise gas prices.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Municipal Year, 1920-21, p. 455.

2. *Ibid.*, 1929, pp. 912-916.

3. *Ibid.*, 1935, p. 859; 1939, p. 202.

4. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, December 2, 1926, p. 7.

He was particularly skilfull in the way he presented his opposition, putting his case in such a way that he gained much Labour support. He maintained that he "could not agree to the 20,000 small householders using gas being called upon to relief (sic) the rates of the 300 people living in big houses."<sup>1</sup> On this occasion, Waddington was defeated; the fact that the Electricity Company had already agreed to a levy for the rates three times that proposed for the Gas Department undermined his position.<sup>2</sup> Waddington was one of the most successful opponents of levies in these towns, yet even his department had £49,398 taken from it in five years during the early 1920's.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, trading company profits were expected to finance a wide range of council activities. For example, in Luton, in 1933, the Electricity Company gave £7,500 towards the cost of building the new Town Hall.<sup>4</sup> In Halifax, Waddington was able to point out how much money had been lost which could have financed new building and modernisation.<sup>2</sup> Company reserves were depleted, and money for new equipment had to be raised from councils. The sums proposed were becoming too large for many councillors to tolerate. For example, when Halifax Electricity Committee wanted to extend the plant at a cost of £159,028 because the station could not cope with winter demand, the Council referred the proposal back.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, councils welcomed the decision of the Government to impose a national system, beginning with the Electricity (Supply) Act of 1926, on electricity departments. Certain stations were proposed for redevelopment within the national grid, but others were destined for closure. In the last analysis the Government became responsible for the working of the system.

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 30, 1933, p. 5, col. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. Municipal Year, 1920-21, Section 10; 1923, p. 520; 1924, p. 559; 1925, p. 610; 1926, p. 710.

4. Luton News, July 27, 1933, p. 5.

5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, August 2, 1928, p. 7.

Immediately, the aim of each council was to secure the inclusion of its own station within the grid in order that it should be developed and modernised, and become a growing source of employment. There was no regional contrast in the determination of councils to secure the inclusion of their station, and the fact that even the tenaciously parochial Northern local authorities were prepared to give up part of their independence indicates how far they felt unable to cope with the size of the problems confronting them. All four were prepared to make once for all expenditure for modernising their stations in order to secure inclusion. One of the largest financial proposals ever laid before Luton Council was presented in order to obtain the inclusion of the Luton station.<sup>1</sup> If the Government had intended by its method of choosing only a proportion of stations for redevelopment, to encourage local authorities to embark on a major programme of capital spending, it could scarcely have found a better method.

The new system was a great improvement on the old. National organisation of electricity supply was combined with a measure of local independence in that the municipalities still controlled pricing. How long the arrangements of 1926 would have continued to operate had the Second World War not intervened and altered the situation is difficult to say. By the late 1930's, the councils were finding even partial responsibility for power supply an overwhelming financial burden. For example, the cost of a new electric power station for Ipswich in 1939 was estimated to be £1,907,125. There was opposition amongst councillors even to the price the council had to pay for the land on which the power station would be built, which was £13,000.<sup>2</sup> It was becoming apparent

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1. Luton News, January 26, 1928, p. 13. The proposal was successful.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, March 30, 1939, p. 9, cols. 3 - 4.



that government would eventually have to accept total financial responsibility for the system if a modern power industry was to be maintained.

Thus in the case of electricity (though not of gas since the Northern local authorities continued in control of this service), the government had mapped out the future of the industry. As regards the tramways, however, the local authorities had to produce their own answers, and the various responses provide an important regional contrast.

The main interwar problem of the local authority transport systems revolved around the question of the future of the tramways. From the early 1920's, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the trams were going to have to be replaced. Several factors, which applied everywhere, were responsible, and can be briefly reviewed at this point. Firstly, the sharp post-war rise in the volume of traffic quickly reduced the lifetime of the tramtracks, thereby multiplying replacement costs. At the same time there was increasing competition from privately owned motor buses. The local authorities, anxious to protect their rights and to obtain public sympathy, alleged that many of the operators were dishonest, using their vehicles to skim off the most profitable rush-hour traffic. There were undoubtedly some of these, but most bus owners were reputable, and the public clearly liked the fast and flexible services they provided. The rapid suburban growth and physical expansion of towns during the interwar period, especially in the South, demanded a new mode of transport that did not involve the initial laying out of substantial fixed capital in the form of tracks and overhead wire. Finally local authorities were shocked

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by the expense involved in repairing the tramways after four years of wartime neglect at a time when prices of labour and materials were at their highest. The ensuing huge bills dislocated councils' finances and brought about unpopular rate rises.<sup>1</sup> Councils were never to feel secure about the tramways again. The good returns of the pre-war years vanished, and in some cases, became losses.

TABLE 9.5: SURPLUS OR DEFICIT ON THE TRAMWAYS.<sup>2</sup>

	<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>HALIFAX</u>	<u>IPSWICH</u>	<u>LUTON</u> <sup>3</sup>
1920-21	- 9752	- 618	- 7802	
1921-22	N.A.	+ 2830	- 7368	
1922-23	+16,474	+18,254	- 3193	

All tramway departments thus suffered losses in the early 1920's, whilst in Ipswich the deficits of 1921 and 1922 were alarmingly large. Councils consequently faced a major challenge: what was to be done with the trams? The size of the problem varied from North to South. Burnley and Halifax tramway systems were larger than those in Luton and Ipswich, and had very much more capital invested in them. Capital expenditure on Burnley tramways in 1920 (£233,000<sup>4</sup>) was double that of either Southern town (Ipswich: £115,675; Luton: £63,000<sup>4</sup>), though little more than half that of Halifax (£421,200<sup>5</sup>). Northern councils had to face the fact that they were going to have to write off very much larger amounts of capital than the Southern local authorities.

The crisis came earlier in the South. Ipswich trams became very unprofitable in the early 1920's, as Table 9.5 shows. They served only a small part of the town, and much of the population

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1. For example, Halifax rates rose from 12/10 to 19/9 in 1920. The post-war problems of the trading companies was one of the principal causes of the increase. Halifax Evening Courier, April 1, 1920, p. 2.
  2. Municipal Year, 1922, p. 490; 1923, p. 530; 1924, pp. 568-570
  3. The Luton tramways were operated by a private company till 1923.
  4. E. Garcke, Manual of Electrical Undertakings and Directory of Officials, 1920-21, pp. 202-3, 433, 522.
  5. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

lived at some distance from a tram track. Luton's tramway had been inaugurated in 1908 and the system leased by the Council to two private companies in turn, neither of which was able to make it pay adequately. The system reverted to Council control in 1923. Luton at this time was expanding rapidly, and was shortly to incorporate large areas of Bedfordshire County within its boundaries. Extensions of the transport system were essential, yet the expense and the disruption to traffic that track laying would cause, were daunting.<sup>1</sup> However, one difficulty that all three councils which were running trams in 1919 shared was that the managers of the transport systems were men who were wedded to the belief that trams were the only viable method of public transport. The advice they gave their chairmen about the future of transport was that they should extend the tram systems. For example, Halifax Council built a route to a neighbouring village, Stainland, in 1921. By the time it was opened, however, some of the problems that were going to dog the trams during this period were becoming apparent, and doubts about the wisdom of the decision to build this link were expressed, even at the opening ceremony.<sup>2</sup> In Burnley also, as soon as the war was over, the manager proposed building extensions to the system. A group of councillors advocated that buses be run on these routes (one of which was more than two and a half miles long), but the manager, Mozley, who had held the post since 1884, argued that "the probability of profit from motor omnibuses is remote."<sup>3</sup> The Council was not persuaded, however, and when the amount of money that had been spent relaying existing track was revealed to the Council,<sup>4</sup> the leader of the Liberal party (Grey) combined with one of the principal Labour councillors to threaten

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1. Luton News, January 24, 1929, p. 9.

2. Halifax Guardian, March 26, 1921, p. 5, col. 4.

3. Burnley Express, July 2, 1919, p. 5, col. 4.

4. Ibid., July 9, 1921, p. 3, col. 3.

Mozley with a vote of censure. This was unjust - the tramways had to be repaired, and the manager's critics had at that time no alternative policy to offer, but the threat of censure meant that from now on, Mozley's advice was not trusted by the Council. The formulation of policy passed to Grey, who, particularly after he became Chairman of the Finance Committee, was to develop ideas of his own about the future of the transport system.

The Ipswich manager, Ayton, was as staunch a supporter of the tramways as his counterparts in Burnley and Halifax. His solution to the main problem of Ipswich tramways (which was that people could walk almost as fast as the trams moved) was to build double tracks, but when the Council was told the cost of this (£106,000)<sup>1</sup> they rejected the proposal, and later turned down the manager's application for an increase in salary.<sup>2</sup>

Why did the managers support the trams so strongly? It is true that at this time buses were still unproved, and many people feared they would prove more expensive than the trams, and cause fares to rise. A preference for trams as the most suitable form of municipal transport is understandable in view of the fact that men like Mozley and Ayton (who had become manager of Ipswich tramways in 1903) had pioneered tram development in these towns, and had built the systems up during their peak years just before the First World War. To scrap the trams was to scrap the work of a lifetime. Yet, at the same time, the opposition of these men even to experimenting with buses seems to indicate that they had closed minds on the subject. Ayton opposed Ipswich Council seeking powers from Parliament to run buses.<sup>3</sup> Mozley's advice, which was similar, was rejected by Burnley Tramways Committee.<sup>4</sup> If the

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, May 15, 1919, p. 7.

2. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1919-20, pp. 236-244.

3. East Anglian Daily Times, July 17, 1919, p. 9, cols. 9 - 10.

4. Burnley Express, July 2, 1919, p. 5, col. 4.

managers had been successful in persuading councils not to experiment with alternative forms of transport to the tram then the learning of vital lessons about motor and trolley bus operation would have been delayed for years.

A vital test of the councils' attitude to their transport systems was whether they were prepared to rethink policy once the trams had started to run into difficulties. There was no pronounced regional contrast in this - Ipswich trams lost money for seven years before they were scrapped, and Halifax's for eight, whereas Burnley trams lost money in only one year before abandonment, and Luton's not at all.

Ipswich Council was the earliest in point of time to abandon the trams. In one sense, the Council was lucky, in as much as Ayton retired in 1921, and the Council was able to appoint an open-minded successor, A.S.Black, who immediately set about considering the future of the trams. Less than a year after his appointment, he decided to experiment with trolley buses. By June 1924, he had demonstrated that these were approximately one third cheaper to run per mile than trams.<sup>1</sup> The question the Council had to resolve was whether it was prepared to face the expense of substituting buses for trams. Though there was some opposition from a group of Labour and Liberal councillors, the Transport Chairman, Reavell, was able to persuade the Council.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of trolley buses was completed by 1927, and they were a success. The average running speed was 22 m.p.h., compared to less than seven m.p.h. for the trams;<sup>3</sup> small profits replaced losses;<sup>4</sup> and the public liked the trolley buses - there was a 38% rise in the number of passengers carried in January 1927<sup>5</sup> compared to the same

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, June 26, 1924, p. 7, col. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, September 25, 1924, p. 4, cols. 3 - 4.

3. *Ibid.*, May 15, 1919, p. 7, col. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, June 20, 1929, p. 7, col. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, February 10, 1927, p. 4, col. 2.

month in the previous year. Thus Ipswich Council was one of the first authorities in the country to abandon the trams. Willingness to innovate, to make a sharp break with the past, and to effect an expensive changeover quickly, is thus apparent on the part of Ipswich Council. Of great importance in this was the determination of the Chairman, Reavell, whose views on the trams co-incided with Black's, and who was instrumental in getting the Council to agree to make the changeover.<sup>1</sup>

In Luton, the decision to scrap the trams was less hard to make than in the other three towns. Much less capital had been invested in the system. At the same time, there was an obligation on the Council to provide the newly incorporated areas in Lee Ward with transport, and trams were virtually ruled out because of the amount of capital that would have had to be raised for track laying, bridge reconstruction and road widening. Faced with the need to introduce buses in one part of the town, the Council had only to make a short step to achieve a general changeover, and it voted to do this at the end of 1931.<sup>2</sup>

Halifax trams lost money steadily after 1926.<sup>3</sup> The Chairman of the Tramways Committee, Alderman Hey, tried several policies to make them pay: reducing fares by a quarter to attract more travellers; raising them by the same proportion to recoup the money lost under the earlier experiment;<sup>4</sup> but on one point he remained firm: "In the centre of a population like that of Halifax, from one mile to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the centre of the town, trams would be needed and could not be superseded by any other form of transport."<sup>5</sup> In 1927, the trams lost £23,434.<sup>6</sup> A new chairman was elected, A.H.Gledhill, a determined and able businessman, who had very decided

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, September 25, 1924, p. 4, cols. 3 - 4.

2. Luton News, September 17, 1931, p. 9; December 17, 1931, p. 13.

3. After 1925, the only year in which the trams made a profit was 1930, one of £379. Municipal Year, 1931, p. 745.

4. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, November 24, 1925, p. 5, col. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, January 6, 1927, p. 3, col. 2.

6. Municipal Year, 1928, p. 654.

views on how the tram problem in Halifax should be solved. It was clear from the widespread support for trams in the Council that a declaration in favour of closing down the entire system would fail, so Gledhill, who firmly intended to do this,<sup>1</sup> decided to proceed piecemeal, making general declarations of approval for the principal of trams each time he announced the closure of an individual track. The wisdom of this policy of stealth was to be amply proved. Opposition to the replacement of the trams was vocal and strong. A major test came in 1931 when £123,060 was required for track renewal. Gledhill demonstrated that the revenue per mile on one route had fallen from 20.28 old pence in 1925 to 13.25 in 1929, whilst three other long routes were running at a loss. Buses should therefore be substituted. Yet, even with these facts available to them, 24 councillors were in favour of renewing the tracks, and Gledhill's proposals were passed by a majority of only five.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, routes away from the town centre were closed down one by one<sup>3</sup>, and by 1934, the buses were demonstrating their financial worth as the profits they made outweighed the losses sustained by the trams.<sup>4</sup> This seemed to Gledhill the right moment to close down one of the major tram routes in the town. Yet the decision passed through the Council by a majority of only three votes.<sup>5</sup> Divided by party the voting was as follows:

For motor buses: 17 Conservatives; 6 Liberals; parties of two councillors unknown.

For trams: 10 Liberals; 12 Labour.

Thus, every Labour councillor who voted opposed the buses. As the central tram routes were now gradually replaced by buses, profits

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, August 4, 1938, p. 5.

2. Ibid., January 8, 1931, p. 6.

3. Ibid., November 9, 1935, p. 6, col. 6.

4. Ibid., July 25, 1935, p. 6, col. 7; Municipal Year, 1935, p. 811.

5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 9, 1936, p. 5.

soared. In 1937, the trams were estimated to have lost £5,670, whereas the buses made £46,399 profit.<sup>1</sup> Even the most sceptical councillors were now convinced, and the decision to shut the remaining tracks was made in 1938 without opposition.<sup>2</sup>

Why was the opposition to the abolition of the trams so strong and particularly on the part of the Labour group? It is useful in attempting to answer this question to examine the experience of Burnley Transport during this period, which was very similar in many respects to that of Halifax.

A Conservative Alderman first advocated that motor buses should replace the trams in Burnley in 1923,<sup>3</sup> but the concern of the men in charge of transport at this time was to demonstrate that trams were still the most efficient form of public transport. The Chairman was a cotton manufacturer, Thornber, who like Hey in Halifax, was a staunch supporter of the trams, and who refused to consider closing branch lines when this was proposed.<sup>4</sup> In 1926, Thornber proposed the construction of an entirely new line. The controversy over this was long and bitter, and divided all three parties on the Council. On two of these occasions, the parties split as follows:

	1926 <sup>5</sup>			1927 <sup>6</sup>		
In favour of buses on the route	2L	1 Lab	1C	9C	4L	2 Lab
In favour of trams on the route	5L	1 Lab	1C	3C	8L	4 Lab

L=Liberal; C=Conservative; Lab=Labour.

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Although the supporters of the buses were defeated finally by 23 votes to 18<sup>6</sup>, the group included many of the abler members of the Council, among them the Chairman of the Finance Committee Alderman Grey. Commenting on poor results in 1928, he announced

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 31, 1938, p. 7, col. 4.

2. Ibid., August 4, 1938, p. 5.

3. Burnley Express, July 14, 1923, p. 7, col. 1.

4. E.g. Ibid., July 3, 1926, p. 5, col. 5.

5. Speakers only. Ibid., September 4, 1926, p. 5.

6. Ibid., January 5, 1927, p. 13.



he was "inclined to look favourably on an offer to take over our transport undertaking."<sup>1</sup> This was an unusual admission of defeat from Grey, who was generally a strong advocate of the municipality providing public services.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the private bus companies also doubted the viability of Burnley's transport concern as it was then organised because Grey's hint was not taken up. The solution had to come from within Burnley Council, but both the Chairman and the Manager remained committed to the trams despite the growing realisation that the new tramway was an error (it never made a profit<sup>3</sup>). It is a measure of the strength of the position of the Chairman of the Finance Committee in Burnley that when Grey decided to take the initiative on the trams, he was able to over-rule both Thornber and Mozley when he wished to do so.<sup>4</sup> Over the ensuing four years, outlying tram services were replaced by buses, till in 1931, the central routes came up for discussion. The decision to abandon the first of these was taken in May 1931, and was forced through against the opposition of Thornber, who shortly after resigned. In his resistance, Thornber, a Liberal, had had the support of four of the leading Labour councillors.<sup>5</sup> The trams were now rapidly run down, and the decision to abandon them finally was taken in September 1934.<sup>6</sup> Opposition to this proposal came from three Labour councillors, who got no support from members of the other parties. As in Halifax, the core of resistance to buses lay in the Labour party. Why was this? Labour councillors argued that scrapping the trams would cause a large loss of revenue to the Electricity Department, and would thereby bring about redundancies<sup>7</sup>, a fear that was valid enough at a time of heavy unemployment, as was the argument that in order

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1. Burnley Express, December 8, 1928, p. 19, col. 5.

2. In 1925 he had stated that "where public service was required that service should be supplied by the local municipal authority."

Ibid., January 10, 1925, p. 12, col. 4.

3. Ibid., September 1, 1934, p. 3, col. 4.

4. As he had done, for example, in 1923, when he abolished merit payments for good tram driving, despite Thornber's opposition.

Ibid., January 6, 1923, p. 15.

5. Ibid., May 9, 1931, p. 4.

6. Ibid., September 1, 1934, p. 3.

7. Ibid.

Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, August 2, 1928, p. 7;  
January 8, 1931, p. 6.

to pay for the new buses, higher fares would have to be charged.<sup>1</sup> But once transport departments had demonstrated that it was the inefficiency of the trams that was causing fares to rise<sup>2</sup>; that the extra passengers buses attracted would create more jobs for drivers and conductors;<sup>2</sup> and that the electricity supply industry was expanding so rapidly that there was no question of redundancies should the tramways be closed down,<sup>5</sup> the continued opposition of some Labour councillors to buses becomes more difficult to understand. It seems that in the Labour party there existed amongst many councillors a real fear of radical change, particularly if that change was likely to prove expensive. Unaccustomed to thinking in terms of large expenditure themselves, the amounts of money (over £350,000 in Halifax<sup>3</sup>) that were required to make the change-over from trams to buses terrified them: better small amounts spent patching up the tramways from year to year than a sudden costly break with the past.

The new bus services soon proved themselves. There is no doubt that they were everywhere popular, and that their speed and efficiency encouraged travelling. Between 1934 and 1939, the number of passengers carried by Burnley Transport (by this time the Burnley, Colne, and Nelson Joint Transport Committee had been set up) rose by 18%, compared to 40% in Halifax, 43% in Ipswich, and 70% in Luton,<sup>4</sup> and this in spite of the fall in population in Burnley, and its stagnation in Halifax. People therefore travelled more often by bus, and the new service in addition tapped much wider areas. By 1939, Halifax Transport operated 184 route miles compared to nearly 88 by the B.C.N.J.T.C., 31.5 by Luton Transport, and 28 by Ipswich Transport.<sup>4</sup> These were very much longer

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 8, 1931, p. 6.
  2. Ibid, p. 6, col. 7; Burnley Express, January 9, 1932, p. 6; February 7, 1931, p. 19, col. 6.
  3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, January 8, 1931, p. 6, col. 5.
  4. Burnley and Halifax still operated trams during this period, so the number of passengers carried by trams have been incorporated within the motor bus figures to avoid giving an inflated rise in bus traffic. Garcke's Manual, 1938-39, p. 517; 1939-40, p. 510; Motor Year Book, 1938-39, pp. 140, 203, 218, 251; 1934-35, p. 115; 189, 245.  
Municipal Year, 1924, pp. 568-570; 1933, pp. 763-765.
  5. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, August 2, 1928, p. 7; Halifax Courier and Guardian, September 8, 1928, p. 11.

distances than those covered by the tramways, which even at their peak length had been only 38.89 miles in Halifax, 13.04 in Burnley, 10.63 in Ipswich, and 5.25 in Luton.<sup>1</sup> The contribution the longer routes - tapping rural areas and nearby small towns - made towards developing these towns as sub-regional centres was considerable, and the benefits they brought were praised by leaders of the retail trades organisations.<sup>2</sup> Return on capital outlay, in the North, was on occasion impressive, touching in the case of the B.C.N.J.T.C. 14.5% in 1935 and 15.9% in 1938.<sup>3</sup> In Halifax, it averaged 6.2% between 1935 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> In the South, however, return on capital outlay was poor, and in certain years (e.g. 1937 in Luton, 1938 in Ipswich, there were losses.)<sup>5</sup>

Why was there a regional contrast in the profitability of bus companies? Were those in the North more efficiently managed, and if so, how far were councils responsible for this? Because transport services were municipally controlled, fares were a source of controversy, and all councillors felt pressure at election times from the public on the question of pricing. No chairman of a transport committee escaped such pressure, though they varied in their ability to resist it.

The formulation of pricing policy was everywhere a very confused business: changes in charges were often made by decisions of council, usually to satisfy the needs of some interest group - Old Age Pensioners, the disabled, the blind, etc., - and without reference to the general profitability of the concern. It required a very powerful chairman to keep control over fares, and a quick witted one to know what the general situation was at any particular time. Workmen's tickets proved to be particularly

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1. Municipal Year, 1924, pp. 568-570; 1933, pp. 763-765.

2. E.g. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, October 27, 1926, p. 7, col. 5.

3. Municipal Year, 1936, p. 824; 1939, p. 106.

4. Ibid., 1936, p. 826; 1937, p. 100; 1938, p. 129; 1939, p. 108.

5. Ibid., 1938, p. 129; East Anglian Daily Times, June 23, 1938, p. 9, col. 2.

controversial, because they were often sold at less than cost, and one of the objects of chairmen was usually to try to ensure that councils broke even on them. When proposals to raise fares were introduced, however, an alliance of Labour councillors with councillors from the older parties who were concerned both about the impact of higher fares on incomes, and about their electoral consequences, invariably emerged to try to defeat the proposal. In Burnley, this alliance generally obtained its way. The most decisive occasion was in 1932 when a slump in travelling co-incided with and was probably caused by the depression. At such times the 'economisers' were at their strongest, but a proposal to raise minimum fares (including workmen's) from 1d. to 1½d., was defeated.<sup>1</sup> Later in the period, the 'low fares' alliance went onto the offensive, and were able to persuade the B.C.N.J.T.C. to propose concessions to various groups of travellers. For example in 1933 it was agreed that schoolchildren should travel at half fare.<sup>2</sup>

Pricing policy in Halifax was frequently confused. Fares were doubled in 1920 when the Chairman informed the Council that the trams had lost £11,000 in four months.<sup>3</sup> These new fares came under heavy attack from councillors of all parties as wages declined<sup>4</sup> but it was not till 1925 that a fare reduction (of 25%) was conceded. The revenue lost by this decision was expected to reduce the tramways profit, but it was hoped that the loss would be recouped by an increase in the numbers travelling. This did not emerge, and the fares were increased again at the end of the year.<sup>5</sup> There were further sharp changes in fares during the following years: they were raised in 1929<sup>6</sup> (some were doubled), but reduced in 1930<sup>7</sup>, and subsequently further reductions were proposed. However, the

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1. Burnley Express, January 9, 1932, p. 6.

2. Ibid., October 7, 1933, p. 13.

3. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, August 7, 1920, p. 4, col. 3.

4. E.g. Ibid., July 5, 1923, p. 5; June 5, 1924, p. 5, cols. 1 - 2.

5. Ibid., November 24, 1925, p. 5, col. 3.

6. Halifax Courier and Guardian, June 8, 1929, p. 10.

7. Ibid., December 4, 1930, p. 9, col. 1.

Chairman, Gledhill, armed with a battery of statistics, argued that the process had gone far enough, and was able to resist the proposed reductions.<sup>1</sup> For the next three years, he maintained an impressive control over pricing policy (just how impressive will be seen when the situation in Ipswich is considered). By the mid-1930's, however, when bus profits were exceeding tram losses, and the memory of the appalling deficits earlier in the period was receding, the 'cheaper fares' group began to obtain its own way. A combination of Liberal and Labour councillors (Gledhill was a Conservative) prevented the imposition of a new (and increased) fare scale in 1935,<sup>2</sup> and proceeded from there to secure important concessions, such as special lower fares for students.<sup>3</sup>

In Ipswich, the 'cheap fares' group was active from the early 1930's, and they soon demonstrated their strength. By 1935, they had imposed an extremely wide range of concessionary fares upon the transport department: for example, cheap fares on routes to council estates, even though these lost money<sup>4</sup>; no charges for children under the age of three; and cheap books of tickets for children travelling to school.<sup>5</sup> Although this was a generous range of concessions, it was still incomplete as far as its supporters were concerned - they had for example been defeated on the issue of free travel for children between the ages of three and five.<sup>6</sup> Yet the concessions that were made were pushed through against the opposition of the Chairman, Grimwade, and by 1937 he had so far lost control that he suffered a major defeat. The new lower fares were helping to cause a decline in receipts, and the manager calculated that there would be a heavy loss (of £4,000) at the end of the year. Grimwade therefore proposed to raise some of the

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, April 7, 1932, p. 9, cols. 2-3.

2. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1935, p. 7, cols. 2 - 3.

3. *Ibid.*, July 25, 1935, p. 6.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, June 30, 1932, p. 9, col. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, August 1, 1935, p. 5, col. 3.

6. *Ibid.*, May 9, 1935, p. 4, col. 2.

fares. The opposition was successfully led by a Labour councillor, who maintained that "the primary purpose of the trolley-bus system is the service of the citizens, the production of a surplus being secondary to this."<sup>1</sup> The expected loss duly materialised, though at £2,342<sup>2</sup>, it was less than had been predicted. The position was serious enough, however. Average profits between 1932 and 1938 had been only £384<sup>3</sup>, so that very little money was available even for repairs, whilst the possibility of replacing the trolley buses by motor buses, as some councillors advocated,<sup>4</sup> was made remote in the absence of reserves to finance the change-over.

The situation in Luton was similar to that in the other towns in that the Transport Committee was obliged to give concession that it felt on economic grounds it could not justify.<sup>5</sup> These had a deleterious impact on profits which averaged only £804 per year between 1932-35,<sup>6</sup> whilst in 1937, the buses lost £1,691.<sup>7</sup>

Councils clearly had a difficult problem to resolve. The views of chairmen were definite, and interestingly, show no regional contrast: they agreed that public service should come before profitability. Alderman Grey's view was that "in matters of transport facilities profit-making was a secondary consideration ... their first consideration was the giving of necessary and desirable public service."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Councillor Grimwade argued that the "business" of the Corporation Transport "was to give the very best service as cheaply and as efficiently as possible."<sup>9</sup> The problem for chairmen was how to strike the right balance between demands for reductions because existing fares "imposed unwarranted hardship"<sup>9</sup>, and the need to provide reserves for replacement of stock, the

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1. Ipswich, Proceedings, 1937-38, p. 89.

2. East Anglian Daily Times, June 23, 1938, p. 9, col. 2.

3. Ibid., June 30, 1932, p. 9; September 21, 1933, p. 9; June 24, 1937, p. 4; June 23, 1938, p. 9; Municipal Year, 1935, p. 804.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, September 20, 1934, p. 9, col. 2.

5. E.g. Luton News, January 20, 1938, p. 5.

6. Municipal Year, 1933, p. 785; 1934, p. 777; 1935, p. 811; 1936, p. 826.

7. Ibid., 1938, p. 129.

8. Burnley Express, January 10, 1925, p. 12, col. 4.

9. East Anglian Daily Times, August 1, 1935, p. 5, col. 3.

provision of new services, etc., at a time when the incomes of many people remained barely enough to provide necessities. As has been seen, to a considerable extent, councils had wrested control over fares from chairmen in all these towns by the end of the period, so that variations in pricing could not account for all the difference in the levels of profitability between transport concerns in the South and those in the North. It is necessary to look elsewhere to explain the greater success of the Northern transport systems. The most decisive factor was the difference in the sizes of the various transport concerns. It does appear that the Ipswich and Luton companies were too small to be truly viable.

TABLE 9.6: THE TRANSPORT DEPARTMENTS COMPARED 1939.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>POPULATION SERVED</u>	<u>NUMBER OF BUSES</u>	<u>ROUTE MILEAGE</u>	<u>NO. PASSENGERS CARRIED</u>	<u>BUS MILES RUN</u>
BURNLEY	275,000	147	87.85	42.86 MILLION	5.1 MIL.
HALIFAX	176,000	166	184	35.5 "	5.3 "
IPSWICH	95,070	70	27.84	18.97 "	2.33 "
LUTON	100,800	67	31.53	13.3 "	1.69 "

Thus, the Northern companies were approximately double the size of the Southern. The expansion of the Ipswich concern in particular was restricted because it operated trolley buses. Extensions involved the use of expensive overhead wiring, and made the operation of marginal services impractical. A motor bus could serve a route twice a day - as was the case with several Northern routes - but a trolley bus service had to be guaranteed substantial traffic in order to justify the initial costs, particularly when reserves were in short supply, as they were in

1. The Motor Transport Year Book and Directory, 1939-40, pp. 138 - 247.

Ipswich.

The table demonstrates that the Northern companies were serving much larger populations, which they did because they co-operated with neighbouring concerns. It is this willingness to pool services and resources in order to obtain economies of scale that distinguishes the Northern from the Southern companies, and it represents a revolution in the attitudes of Burnley and Halifax councils to co-operating with outside bodies. Both councils had traditionally been fiercely jealous of their independence. The manager of Burnley Transport commented after the B.C.N.J.T.C. had been set up on the "attention" that had to be paid "to the strong parochial sentiments actuating the representatives" of the three councils involved.<sup>1</sup> That they went so far as to amalgamate is a measure of the size of the crisis their transport services had passed through. The idea of amalgamating the tramways of the three councils had first been proposed in 1923<sup>2</sup>, but it was not until the crisis of 1930-32, when unemployment and the cotton strikes of those years co-incided with a sharp decline in receipts that amalgamation was seriously canvassed. Grey became a vigorous advocate of the idea, and overcame substantial opposition in both the Council and the town, which principally rested on the view that Burnley's comparatively efficient concern was going to be made to subsidise the inefficient companies of Nelson and Colne.<sup>3</sup> Working from a paper prepared by the manager, Grey convinced the Council of the advantages the amalgamation would bring: it would serve a quarter of a million people, would permit longer routes to be run, resources to be pooled, and substantial economies of scale to be reaped. One of the first actions of the new committee was to persuade the three councils to shut down their tramways. After the

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1. Modern Transport, June 16, 1934, p. 7.

2. Burnley Express, August 11, 1923, p. 9, cols. 5 - 6.

3. Indeed, Colne tramways were worn out by the time they were closed. The last Colne tram to run broke down with the Mayor and Council on board. Burnley Express, February 8, 1933, p. 4, col. 3; January 10, 1934, p. 2.



general introduction of buses, the new company soon proved its viability, expanding business, and turning losses into profits. Its success so impressed some councillors that calls were made for the amalgamation of other services in the area, such as the Gas industry.

The B.C.N.J.T.C. was a more ambitious concept than the company set up by Halifax Council in association with the two railway companies, the L.M.S. and the L.N.E.R. This was a partial amalgamation to cover districts where the three had been in competition during the 1920's. A fall in the number of passengers had caused declining receipts at a time when more private bus companies were setting up to compete for the traffic. In response to this, Gledhill negotiated an agreement with the railway companies<sup>1</sup> which established a Joint Committee to run bus services outside the town. Rationalisation of services rapidly followed. The railway companies closed down their branch lines, and transferred their traffic to the Joint Committee.<sup>2</sup> During the early 1930's, the Joint Committee acquired many of the private operators in the area which had previously skimmed off much rush-hour traffic.<sup>3</sup> By 1933 the Joint Committee was running its services at a profit<sup>4</sup>, but the fact that the railway companies were the Council's partners dissatisfied many Labour councillors, who disliked the municipality abandoning some of its powers to private enterprise, and who had a particular objection to the L.M.S. and the L.N.E.R. because of the industrial relations policies they had pursued in the aftermath of the General Strike. Labour consequently opposed proposals to run new routes in co-operation with the railway companies,<sup>5</sup> but the party was never strong enough to defeat Gledhill

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1. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, March 30, 1929, p. 5, cols. 1-2.

2. Modern Transport, September 4, 1937, p. 11.

3. Ibid. Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian, February 8, 1934, p. 7, col. 2.

4. Ibid., July 25, 1935, p. 6.

5. Ibid., January 9, 1936, p. 5.

on this issue.

Neither Southern council made arrangements of this sort with other transport companies, or attempted to do so, though both had the opportunity. Luton Council received an offer from the Eastern National Omnibus Company for its trams. The timing of the offer was exactly right - it arrived when the Council was trying to decide whether to scrap its trams, and was unable to make up its collective mind.<sup>1</sup> The Council agreed to the offer by 17 votes to 7.<sup>2</sup> No attempt was made to discover if a different arrangement, combining the two companies without one being entirely absorbed by the other, could be set up, and the failure to do this was a mistake, because the Council should have known that a Labour Government was unlikely to look favourably on a proposal to de-municipalise an industry, and indeed, the Ministry of Transport intervened and forbade the sale.<sup>3</sup> This proved to be the end of the attempts to make an agreement with the E.N.O.C.: no arrangement was made for the pooling of resources and sharing of routes that might have enabled Luton Transport to become a more effective undertaking.

Ipswich Council also received an offer from a private bus company - the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company - for its trams. The timing here was also well judged - the offer came when Ipswich Council was trying to decide whether to abandon its trams. The E.C.O.C. offered to buy the undertaking, replace the trams with buses, and pay the town £6,000 a year for 20 years.<sup>4</sup> The Council, led by the Chairman, voted unanimously against the offer. He expressed two doubts about the terms: what would be the position in twenty years time, and would the E.C.O.C. provide

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1. Luton News, January 24, 1929, p. 9.

2. Ibid., January 22, 1931, p. 8.

3. Ibid., July 2, 1931, p. 12.

4. East Anglian Daily Times, December 11, 1924, p.4, cols. 4-5; p.6.

necessary but unprofitable services?<sup>1</sup> However, the root cause of the opposition throughout the Council was dislike of handing over a municipal service to an outside body.

The contrast between the response of the two Southern councils to offers from private enterprise indicates the strength of civic pride in Ipswich and its weakness in Luton. Selling the concern, as was advocated in Luton, was an error: it was right that an essential public service like transport should be subject to the scrutiny of public opinion, and that management should not be able to impose fare increases unilaterally. This right was the more likely to be abused in the 1930's, when the Traffic Commissioners were permitting single companies to have near-monopoly rights in the areas in which they operated.

At the same time, the decision to confine the transport companies to small areas round these towns in effect deprived them of the advantages deriving from large scale operation. It might not have been difficult to obtain from the E.C.O.C. and the E.N.O.C. the sort of co-operation Halifax Council secured from the railway companies: the point of criticism was that this was never tried by either Southern council. In this respect, it does seem that the Northern councils were more imaginative, more prepared to make a sharp break with the past, and more willing to try unorthodox approaches to the solution of problems.

At this point it is proposed to discuss briefly the relations between chairmen and managers. During this period chairmen were in the ascendant, and when the type of man who came forward to take up these positions is considered, the fact is not very surprising. The trading committees were generally chaired by businessmen, who

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1. East Anglian Daily Times, December 11, 1924, p. 6.

were often the owners of large companies. They were very often Liberals and Non-conformists, as the table below shows.

TABLE 9.7: CHAIRMEN OF THE GAS, ELECTRICITY AND PASSENGER TRANSPORT COMMITTEES.

<u>BURNLEY</u>	<u>COMMITTEE</u>	<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>AGE ON ELECTION</u>	<u>NO. YEARS AS CHAIRMAN</u>	<u>PARTY</u>	<u>RELIGN</u>
Nuttall	E	Cotton Mnfr.	-	12	L	Method.
Thornber	T	" "	53	11	L	-
Emmott	G	" "	36	27	L	Baptist
Witham	G	" "	54	10	C	C.of E.
Grey	Finance	" "	47	13	L	Methodist
Bracewell	G	Dir. Burnley Bldg Society	-	6 <sup>1</sup>	L	-
Gradwell	E	T.U.Secretary	-	3	Lab	-
<u>HALIFAX</u>						
Gledhill	T	Cash Register Mnfr.	54	11	C	Wesleyan
Holdsworth	T	Dir. Bus Company	56	-	L	-
Waddington	G	Dept.Store Owner	50	23 <sup>1</sup>	L	Wesleyan
Hey	T	Wool Mnfr.	61	9	L	"
<u>IPSWICH</u>						
Grimwade	E & T	Dept.Store Owner	51	11 <sup>1</sup>	L	Congeg'st.
Rapnsome	E & T	Man.Dir. Ransomes, Sims, Jefferies	-	-	C	C.of E.
Reavell	E & T	Man.Dir. Wm. Reavell.	54	-	L	Congreg'st.
<u>LUTON</u>						
Wilkinson	E	Straw Plait Merchant	-	7 <sup>1</sup>	L	-
Dillingham	E	Straw Hat Manufr.	-	9	C	C.of E.

E = Electricity; G = Gas; T = Transport.

C = Conservative; L = Liberal; Lab = Labour.

1. At least this length of service.

Businessmen were chosen for these jobs because they had experience of running large spending concerns and were accustomed to taking important decisions. The inclusion in the list of several of the more important industrial innovators in these towns - Grey, Witham, Reavell, Ransome, Gledhill - is interesting: it does not appear from their business careers that active participation in local government had an adverse effect on their companies. Indeed, holding a chairmanship may have been beneficial to a chairman's business, introducing him to contacts in other towns, widening his experience of the ways companies operated, and making him familiar with new business methods and techniques. But this was not the primary motive encouraging these businessmen to seek out chairmanships: the desire to participate actively in local government was the key factor, and the vigour which men like Grey and Gledhill brought to their work is impressive.

The salaried officials found it difficult to resist the ideas of such men. Although managers retained control of day-to-day management, key decisions were taken by chairmen. Reavell led the opposition to selling the Ipswich trams; Dillingham in Luton was the leading advocate in favour of sale. Grey determined the process of tram abandonment in Burnley, whilst Gledhill led the negotiations with the railway companies. This dominance by chairmen was strengthened by two additional factors. Firstly, the managers in charge of the trams at the start of the period had discredited themselves, at considerable cost to three of the towns, and thereafter, councils had strong reservations about the advice they gave.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the pronounced reluctance of councils to paying higher salaries during this period meant that turnover in management

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1. The remark by Cr. Hale (Labour) of Burnley exemplifies a general view on the tramway managers: "The Tramway Manager would persist in reverting to what was done 20 to 40 years ago, and it was quite a standing joke." Burnley Express, July 9, 1921, p. 3, col. 3. Another councillor remarked "the new routes had been suggested by Mr. Mozley, but, as they knew, Mr. Mozley was not infallible." Ibid., September 6, 1924, p. 4, col. 6.

was rapid. Continuity of control rested with chairmen, who as the table shows, tended to have long terms in office. When an official did get a salary increase, it was only with the support of the chairman - the attempt was doomed otherwise - which further strengthened his authority.

The chairman's control was in fact limited not by the salaried official, but by the council. The strongest points the businessmen had in their favour: their familiarity with decision-making, and their confidence in ordering the spending of large sums of money, were not necessarily advantages in the eyes of many councillors. The former looked a little like authoritarianism, and the latter terrified the more timid councillors. The firmness and determination of most chairmen was vital in ensuring that clear lines of policy were established, and vigorous attempts made to carry them through, but this determination was sometimes an irritant, and contributed to the strength of the alliances built up against chairmen. In Ipswich in the 1930's, the Council, not the Chairman or the Manager, had control of the pricing policy of the transport company. Gledhill, in Halifax, came very close to seeing the central plank of his policy - the scrapping of the trams - knocked out by the Council, and there were some narrow decisions in Burnley too on the same issue. Northern chairmen were able to keep control because of the strength of the committee system there, the determination of the Chairmen of the Finance Committees that energetic policies should be pursued in the solving of problems, and most important of all, the extent of the crisis that had hit the trading departments.

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CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION.

The argument of this thesis has been that existing views of the North-South relationship in England between the wars are unsatisfactory. The impression that the balance between North and South tilted sharply in favour of the latter is very inadequate. Although in two important respects, as far as these towns are concerned, a pronounced regional gap in favour of the South did appear: in population change and in economic growth, the latter did not bring with it continuous improvement of urban amenities. Classes in schools were larger in the South, and teachers were in short supply there. Technical education was superior in the North throughout the period, and a gap in the proportions receiving grammar school educations had been eliminated by the end of it. There was no regional divergence in the ratio of general practitioners to population, or in the availability of hospital beds. Although there were higher levels of unemployment in the North, incomes of most of the population were not markedly lower than in the South. The Labour party did well in all four towns, and in the one where it gained control successfully put economic growth before social amelioration. Economic life did not die "outright" in the North during this period.<sup>1</sup> The middle class in both North and South continued active at a municipal level. In many respects the Northern towns proved to be remarkably resilient: social capital was not permitted to deteriorate there, nor did crime rates rise higher than in the South. Indeed, in the provision of education, health and council housing a regional gap had appeared by 1939 that was in favour of the North.

The reasons for this lay in the population movements of the time, the continuing presence in the South as well as the North of large numbers of poor people, changes made by the Central Government to the financing of the local authorities, and the superior quality

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1. N.Branson and M.Heinemann, op. cit., p. 41.

of municipal government in the North.

The migrations of the interwar period were largely migrations of the poor. The unemployed left the North, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and depressed agricultural areas in Southern England, to seek for work in towns like Ipswich and Luton. As the Northern towns, and Burnley especially, lost many very poor people, the Southern towns gained them. The burden on the Northern councils' social services was thus reduced; in the South it was increased. The Southern ability to cope with growing financial demands was hindered by the changes made in rating policy by the Government. The deratings of industry deprived the Southern councils of sources of finance that would otherwise have grown very rapidly, and the Central Government grants with which they were compensated were distributed much more evenly between these towns than new industry was. The amount councils were able to raise from ratepayers was limited by the dislike ratepayers - the rich as well as the poor - felt for paying higher rates. Hence, the ingenuity and imaginativeness of local government personnel became of great importance. In this respect the Northern towns had a great advantage. They had more vigorous party political systems, drawing on a wide range of talents, and they were better attuned to the currents of public opinion. Their managerial policies were sufficiently skilful to enable them to expand not only vital services such as health and education, but also relatively peripheral ones such as the libraries. Occasionally they proved remarkably bold - Burnley's New Industries programme was by any municipal standard an impressive achievement. Behind the successful policies the Northern councils introduced lay a robust tradition of local pride, of local attachment, which invigorated municipal politics and which is also a more useful concept for distinguishing Northerner and Southerner than discussions about "softness" and "toughness", "masculine" and "feminine", "real" and "unreal".

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