Regional survey and the economic geographies of Britain 1930–1939

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This paper re-considers the history of economic geography in the interwar period in Britain. The activities of the discipline are considered in the context of the commercial geographies of this time, and the intensive round of industrial and social surveys undertaken at a regional level in Britain in the period. Taken together, these economic geographies constructed a range of representational and material spaces and helped construct industrial regions characterized by particular types of places, peoples and performances. These surveys, and the production of the economic geographies that they facilitated, became a key intellectual arena where conflicting ideas about the political and economic management of the industrial region and the national economic were acted out. Following the intention of recent work into the histories of geographical knowledge, the essay will seek out the lateral associations of economic geography, paying particular attention to politically situated nature of the economic geographies produced by academics, regional organizations and the Labour Party.

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Introduction

In May 1931, the Secretary to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, Mr Raymond Streat, travelled to the USA and Canada, to consider what prospects and opportunities North America might have for the merchants of an increasingly economically depressed Lancashire. North America may appear to be an odd place to consider the nature of British regionalism, but it was here that Streat encountered the work of the New England Council, established in Boston in the early 1920s, ‘to promote the modernisation and development of New England, to encourage new industries to replace the lost ones and in every way to work for the betterment of the whole area’. Sailing from Liverpool on the liner Britannic, he arrived in New York and from there toured all the major cities on the Eastern Seaboard. In New York, aside from business meetings and research, he visited Connie’s Inn, a ‘Harlem coloured nightclub’ where he recalled the show as ‘furious and bare’ and where, at the height of Prohibition, people drank ‘liquor’ from hip flasks and paid a ‘dollar for a drink of orangeade’. Whilst Streat’s diary is filled with an Englishman’s observations of New York, his central concern on the Eastern Seaboard was to establish contacts in business and banking circles and to explore, as he noted himself, ‘the methods employed in industrial development work’, and to investigate ‘particular features which would attract or repel trans-Atlantic concerns to or from Lancashire’. It is upon this basis that Streat paid particular interest to the activities of the New England Council. When he returned to Manchester, he reported that there were obvious parallels between New England and Lancashire, not only due to the existence of the cotton and textile industry in both, but because New England too had witnessed a ‘drift’ of industry, in their case to the southern US states. Streat at this point, like many others living in the north of England, was very familiar with this question of ‘drift’ and was acutely aware that images of decline had become incorporated into the structure of governmental and
corporate governance. He concluded that there was much to be learned from the model for industrial development they had devised, especially since as in Lancashire, the regional organization originated when ‘responsible leaders of New England business’ developed a strategy to combat economic decline. To the Chamber of Commerce in Manchester, he reported:

The Council found that one of the best ways to get the outer world to believe in the future of New England was to restore the faith of New Englanders in themselves, at the same time defending their faith with true facts as to the possessions and activities of which New England could be proud in spite of her pessimists. The Council has worked on these lines for some time and with conspicuous success. With a generosity which is one of the finest of the typical American attributes, the officials of the Council have given me the full story of their work and achievements . . . I feel very much encouraged to think that the Lancashire by working on similar lines may do much to attain the same ends for Lancashire.⁴

According to his report, in terms of ‘propaganda’, the New England Council worked on five key principles. First, ‘Propaganda to maintain the locality’s faith in itself is as necessary as external propaganda’. Second, ‘Propaganda in favour of improvement of internal facilities, if fearless and persistent, do more good that anything else with the outsider looking for a factory site. It makes him feel that he is coming to a place where things are progressing’. Third, when new industry did arrive in the area, then it should be widely publicized, because they ‘find that news of that kind the best possible inducement to others’. Fourth, pamphlets and booklets should always be up to date, well distributed, and printing and writing should be ‘first class’. Fifth, ‘the principle of having a scientific survey made of the area, setting out all its potentials in accurate figures and facts, have proved most valuable . . .’.⁵

My purpose in beginning with this story is to bring into the foreground a range of events and actors which have been neglected in twentieth-century regional histories of Britain, but which played a significant role in shaping and constructing the region; as an idea, as a realizable object and as an instrument of policy. The social and economic crisis of interwar Britain was expressed in the traditional industrial districts. When Streat returned from New York not only did he report to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, but he also made a full report to the Board of Trade, passing over numerous documents about the activities of the New England Council. As I will outline below, from January of that same year, the Board of Trade had commissioned universities in the regions to undertake the first large-scale regional industrial survey, a survey that was to draw economists and a handful of geographers into the question of the crisis of the industrial regions. Under advice of the Chief Industrial Advisor at the Treasury, Sir Horace J. Wilson, regional development councils were also encouraged to galvanize regional business interests in Scotland, Lancashire, the North East and South Wales. They were also expected to cooperate with the development of the regional survey, which was ostensibly intended to provide the economic intelligence needed to manage the industrial crisis. Wilson met Streat at the Treasury and was so animated by his intelligence on the New England Council that it was arranged for 20 copies of their publication Try these on your Town to be distributed throughout the regions participating in the industrial survey.⁶

This period is characterized by mass unemployment, regional divergence and acute levels of poverty and inequality in traditional industrial areas. Whilst certain regions, notably in the south of England experienced real levels of prosperity, in the early 1930s, nearly three million people were unemployed in Britain (Ward 1988). These developments stimulated an intensive round of industrial and social surveys undertaken at a regional level in Britain throughout the 1920s and 1930s. At the end of them, the various surveys and intense speculations about the dimensions of industrial unrest, unemployment and productivity would contribute to the creation of a new space of governmentality. Historians of numbers and of statistics have consistently linked the development of surveying capacity with the state. For Rose the production of numbers has ‘an unmistakable power in modern culture’ (Rose 1988). Devising modes of calculation is key to questions of government, an issue central to Foucault’s concept of governmentality, where the production of geographical knowledge is conceptualized as intimately bound up with the problematics of population and economy. Following the Board of Trade Surveys in 1931, the Ministry of Labour published four further surveys in 1934. These surveys led to the establishment of the Special Areas Commission in 1935. This was the first attempt to devise a regional policy in Britain and its annual reports were highly influential in shaping official reading of the ‘regional problem’. 
The Labour Party responded with *Survey of the Distressed Areas* undertaken in a blaze of publicity in 1936–7 and in 1938, the Royal Commission on the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population, a massive survey of British industry and economic and spatial planning began its deliberations. In contrast to the originators of the regional survey movement, such as the Le Play Society, who represented survey largely as a civic activity, the regional industrial surveys produced by the state, by regional organizations and by political parties were produced in a contested environment (Matless 1993). These surveys, and the production of the economic geographies that they facilitated, became a key intellectual arena where conflicting ideas about the political and economic management of the industrial region and the national economic were acted out. Taken together they constructed a range of representational and material spaces and helped construct industrial regions characterized by particular types of places, peoples and performances.

Operating within the spaces promoted by a range of literatures that have decentered the meaning of ‘the economic’, and drawing upon modes of analysis in cultural geography and in the history of science, this essay attempts to explore the cultural history of this process. This is an issue that has received scant recognition in somewhat Whiggish treatments of this process. This is an issue where the battle to represent the economy occurred and the production of economic geography became an important context where the battle to represent the economy occurred and the production of economic space itself contested. My approach to ‘Economic Geography’ will encompass both disciplinary and non-disciplinary contexts, with a stronger emphasis on the latter. Following the intention of recent work into the histories of geographical knowledge, the essay will seek out the lateral associations of economic geography (Driver 1992; Smith 1994; Withers 2000). With the exception of the work of Trevor Barnes and Leslie Hepple, few have considered the political role of economic geographies and of the economic geographer in the early part of the twentieth century (Barnes 1998 2000 2001; Hepple 1999). This lack of interest is curious, given that over the last decade or more the history of geography has, as Neil Smith has argued, become ‘a fecund terrain for ploughing larger intellectual questions of cultural identity, cultural history and cultural politics’ (Smith 1994, 492). This blip in the research agenda blinks more vigorously when one considers the extent to which the cultural turn has influenced the practice of contemporary economic geography. Recent developments in the philosophy of economic geography, with their emphasis upon the social and cultural institutions through which the economy is produced, represented and consumed, has generated vigorous and sometime divisive debate on this issue (Thrift and Amin 2000; Martin and Sunely 2001). Unhinging the cultural and the economic from their separate spheres has opened up new themes of enquiry, many of which have become associated with the increasingly cultural and apparently ‘weightless’ nature of the new economy (Kong 2000).

Recent developments here have paid more attention to the discursive and social contexts in which economic knowledge and action is made (Jackson 2002). What consequence the cultural turn will have on the practice of contemporary economic geography will have to be reviewed somewhere other than here. But taken as a whole, this debate enlivens some of the histories we can proceed with, since it has been recognized that all ‘economic geography is inescapably ideological’ (Martin 1994, 39).

My aim in this paper is to consider elements of this ideological history and review some of the interplay between ideas, political calculations and organized interests in their use of geographical knowledge during this period. I will show, from 1930s, how the production of economic geography became an important context where the battle to represent the economy occurred and the production of economic space itself contested. My approach to ‘Economic Geography’ will encompass both disciplinary and non-disciplinary contexts, with a stronger emphasis on the latter. Following the intention of recent work into the histories of geographical knowledge, the essay will seek out the lateral associations of economic geography (Driver 1992; Smith 1994; Withers 2001). I hope, in particular, to pay attention to the politically situated nature of geographical knowledge and its intersection with questions of regional and national identity.

**Envisioning economy**

For Tooze, our understanding of ‘the economy’ as a distinct social ‘sphere’ or social ‘system’ is a product of ‘dramatic processes of imaginative abstraction and representational labour’ (Tooze 1998). Social constructivist arguments of this kind draw attention to the various ways economic knowledge is made through social, cultural and political processes. In this light, the production of the economy has often been linked to the state (Desrosieres 1990; Tooze 2001). As Carter notes,
from cartographers’ maps of the national territories to the presentation of columns and graphs in daily reports, the state must create and recreate a vision or visions of its own existence. (Carter 1994, 74)

From the advent of nationalistic mercantilism of the seventeenth century, political space was conceived in terms of fixed and mutually exclusive nation-states. As a consequence, economic spaces came to be visualized as aggregate national entities in direct competition with one another, forming the basis of the laissez-faire national capitalism promoted by the classical economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Myers 1983; Daly 1991; Mitchell 1998). The rise of neo-classical economics in the 1870s onwards did little to mitigate this fascination with a spaceless national economy. The same could be said of Keynesian economics as it developed at the end of the 1930s and into the 1940s. As Radice has argued, the notion of the national economy was privileged in Keynesian theory for

the purely practical reason that the nation-state system defines geopolitical space with the necessary features convenient for the theory: a common currency, common laws, and shared institutions. (Radice 1988)

To suggest, however, that ‘the economy’ lies only in the gift of the state and its economists is to flatten out a more complex story. Such a view is not subtle enough to encompass the various tensions and ways in which versions of ‘the economy’ can be negotiated within civil society. Giddens has argued,

there cannot be a clear insulation between statistics and models used by economists and that which is either read or filters through in other ways to interested parties in the population: business leaders, government officials and members of the public. (Giddens 1990, 41)

Moreover, as Buck-Morss (1995) has observed, for the agency of the economy to be ‘seen’, it had to be envisioned, often through a process of representational mapping and story telling. Such forms of coding and objectification led to the creation of ‘hard things’ like GNP or unemployment rates, allowing for the ‘the economy’ and the identity of economists to be co-constructed. Projected through different forms – images, maps, narratives, people, objects and landscapes, the generation of knowledge about the economy is a process that clearly seeps out from economic formulae and is mediated in other social arenas (Linehan 2000). Hence, representations of place, in association with metaphors of the body, of climate, or economic subjects – the entrepreneur, the tramp – act as vehicles through which stories about the economy are made. In this sense, economic knowledge is produced in heterogeneous networks in which actants of all kinds, social, technical and natural, play a role.

The inter-war period presents a rich and heterogeneous representational environment where the condition of the economy was continuously regarded, commented upon and, particularly important for the themes of this essay, made visible and brought into the public domain. These economic geographies took many shapes and forms and underline the varied political contexts in which information about the economy were produced and consumed. Recently, Thrift and Amin (2000) argued that as a discipline economic geography is not an attractive subject: that it was a little boring, was not attracting postgraduates and was, as a result, in crisis. Whilst in the 1930s the discipline of economic geography was relatively smaller and more politically constrained than it is today, it is difficult to identify a comparable sense of malaise. The period was densely packed with a whole variety of economic inquiries that led to the proliferation of a whole range of economic geographies, academic, popular, commercial and official. The 1930s in particular was a period when unemployment meant questions about industrial location were a matter of popular debate (Ritschell 1997). The economic problems of Britain and the forms of planning to emerge made the question of economic geography a popular and political subject for a long period in the twentieth century. In time, these issues fuelled the discipline, notably in the post-war period, but it must be stressed that these debates were not confined to academics and certainly not owned by just formally trained economic geographers. To hold, therefore, that the potential histories of economic geography lie only between the covers of George Goudie Chisholm’s Commercial Geography – often represented as a singular milestone in the discipline in Britain – is to have too narrow a perspective (Freeman 1965; Barnes 2000).

For example, economic geographies could be used to contest government policy as the numerous maps produced by the British Communist Party reveal (Figure 1). Equally, they could be used to mobilize political opinion in the centre-ground. When The Listener – a publication of the British Broadcast Corporation – attempted to produce a facsimile of the economy through an early Isotype graphic representing the drift of labour and industry to the south of England, it revealed part of a more general
Figure 1 A Labour plan for Lancashire

Source: Labour History Archive, Manchester, LP/DAC/1/43

symbolic process where knowledges about the economy were projected through a variety of media (Figure 2). These maps and diagrams demonstrate some of the complex ways in which the 'economy' was represented and interpreted. Very often this was done for clear commercial purposes. A number of widely available forms of economic intelligence prepared for the business community, especially in relation to marketing and advertising, manipulated a version of the economy for their own purposes. These included The Marketing Survey of the United Kingdom and The Home Market: a book of facts about
Inequalities of Unemployment. *By Geoffrey Crowther* - page 737

Diagram showing the geographical incidence of abnormal unemployment in Great Britain today

**Figure 2 Envisioning industrial migration**

*Source: The Listener* (30 October 1935)
people (Wood 1936; Chisholm 1937). Each of these texts ran to several editions before and after the Second World War and, by manipulating different versions of pictorial statistics, were designed to have a popular appeal and wide consumption. The Marketing Survey of the United Kingdom developed what it called the ‘Purchasing Power Index’, which gives one at a glance an assessment of the purchasing power of any county or of any of the 136 largest markets as compared with the numerical strength of its population. (Wood 1936, 22)

Underlying the emphasis given to making the economy visible, the Home Market made ample use of innovation in graphic design and cartography to present ‘a statistical picture book’ of Britain (Figure 3). The user-friendly design was a precursor of the method in his Social and Economic Museum in Vienna after the Great War, pictorial statistics were essential to forging informed and radical citizenship, arguing that the ordinary citizen ‘ought to be able to get information freely about all subjects in which he is interested, just as he can get geographical knowledge from maps and atlases’ (Neurath 1945, 3). Hence, for The Economist, the maps and charts in the Home Market were able to show that

one half of Britain is the most prosperous industrial country in the world. The other half is among the most depressed. Though they share one code of laws, one language and one currency, these two nations have not very much else in common.10

The production of economic geography for commercial purposes was also amongst the aims of the magazine Business, the ‘complete journal of management’. From the late 1920s, it produced a monthly map of economic performance that envisioned the state of the national economy (Figure 4). The magazine claimed to reach 60 000 ‘controlling executives’ a month through the ‘16,873 commercial concerns who subscribe yearly in advance’.11 For July 1928, for example, it produced, in addition to a region by region report, a ‘Business Weather Map’, in which the ‘latest reports on trade conditions in the important centres of the British Isles’ were displayed.12 The maps, it claimed, were compiled on the basis of special correspondents and businessmen and were supported by short regional reports on local industry.13 From this information, it maintained that ‘the answer to your question – How’s trade in this area or that? – is given in detail in the text and in at-a-glance form in the maps’ (my emphasis).14 It claimed that from ‘no other source can you get such a comprehensive yet rapid insight into the trade conditions throughout the country’. These reports and maps were produced continuously on a monthly basis throughout the 1930s. Later, the term ‘weather map’ was dropped and the reproduction of the maps side by side with graphic representations of economic performance enhanced the neutral scientific gaze of the cartographic analysis (Figure 5).

Reports such as these reflect the kind of economic geographies that were consistently produced for the business community in the industrial press. These had a sustained influence in shaping discourses about successful and unsuccessful economic spaces in Britain. In doing so they fuelled anxieties about the growing social and economic divergence in the country, established in press and radio reports and on a more literary plain in accounts about the condition of Britain in texts like J.B. Priestly’s English Journey and George Orwell’s Wigan Pier (Priestly [1933] 1977; Orwell 1937). These kinds of visions of national economic space were exploited effectively by different urban councils and companies, such as Slough Industrial Estates Ltd and other industrial real-estate companies like the Southern Railroad Company. In this advertisement for Southampton Docks, there were no holds barred when it came to presenting a commercial geography that demonstrated the market opportunities because of the ‘drift’ from the North (Figure 6). And when Barking produced its advertisement, it envisioned an industrial location primed as a new field for Fordism, ready with all the modern things: connectivity, technology and marketability (Figure 7). The production of economic geographies of this nature was a particularly effective way of making the economy visible, drawing as it did on the authority and popularity of the map, and connecting issues about the economy to questions about places. In offering a kind of tangibility not possible with a statistical table or a graph, this was a form of visibility grounded in everyday or institutional practices and which resulted in a variety of strategic interventions. The
mobilizations were used variously to criticize the government, or to sell industrial space or market information. Whilst such questions about the representation of economy undermine the truth claims of economic science, they do not necessarily undermine the utility of these reifications in acting in the world.

**The Board of Trade regional surveys**

When the Labour Party was returned to power in 1929, criticism abounded that the government was not doing enough to deal with rising unemployment. The political will to undertake the surveys was accelerated following the Liberal Party’s publication
We Can Conquer Unemployment – a document that argued, amongst other things, for the development of public works to address unemployment. These Liberal proposals were rejected, but nevertheless the political discussion that followed revealed that the level of detailed economic intelligence about the depressed industrial regions was limited. The decision to undertake the survey was approved by a special panel of ministers on unemployment, and as Chief Industrial Advisor, Sir Horace Wilson saw through the policy. Five surveys would eventually be published, the research in each case done in the main by the universities or colleges in the respective regions. The Lancashire Area was executed by the University of Manchester; the Merseyside Area by the University of Liverpool; the North East Coast Area by Armstrong College, Newcastle; the survey of Scotland by the Political Economy Department of the University of Glasgow and South Wales by the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire.\(^\text{15}\)

To begin the survey, Wilson contacted Professor Scott in University of Glasgow, who had conducted a survey in the West of Scotland in the immediate
Figure 5  Regional activity indices

Source: Business (January 1938, 41)
Figure 6 Envisioning 'drift'

Source: Advertisement in The Times Trade and Engineering (May 1935, 16)
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First World War period, in association with Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and who had worked for the Carnegie Trust on their research series on post First World War economic and social reconstruction in Europe. In the letter to Scott, Wilson outlined the rationale behind the survey:

The origin of the idea is an apprehension that certain counties or regions of Great Britain may suffer from permanent industrial depression even after a return to general prosperity unless new industries or branches of industry develop in order to take the place of existing industries who are likely to dwindle. Possible illustrations are Lancashire, South Wales and say, Lanarkshire owing to their dependence on cotton, coal and iron and steel combined with coal collectively. The proposed survey would be essentially an industrial survey of the regions concerned. The object is to assess the prospect and prospective industrial capacity of the regions in view of a feared decline of the old industries and of the possible introduction of new industries. We hope that in view of the experience which you and your team have had of investigations into a generally similar characteristic, you may be able to help us in framing the general lines of the proposed surveys which no doubt should be on uniform lines in the various cases.16

Wilson played upon Scott’s patriotism, and the professor soon agreed to offer his services without any financial compensation. Wilson informed the cabinet that, ‘similar willingness and capacity on the part of the Universities of Cardiff, Manchester and Newcastle may be assumed’.17 He proposed that the universities would probably allocate members of their lecturing staff and postgraduate workers in economics for the work.18 The choice of economists over economic geographers is significant, but as it happened, it was not just economists who participated. The Department of Geography at Armstrong College provided a relief map and in Manchester the new geography professor there, H.J. Fleure, is thanked in the preface for his department’s contribution to the survey. If these links are tenuous, the role the geographer G.H. Daysh – who played a central part in the making of the surveys in the North East – is clearer. Daysh joined the staff of Armstrong College in 1930 and was immediately employed on the Board of Trade survey of the North East during 1931, producing a special memorandum on ‘The Geographical characteristics of the North-Coast Area’ which was published in the final report. Several articles in mainstream geographical journals resulted. In 1933 he published his findings with the economist E. Allen in the Scottish Geographical Magazine (Daysh and Allen 1933). Two years later he published ‘Tyneside’ in the Journal of Economic Geography (Daysh 1935). This work on the economic geographies of the region was to have a profound effect on his career and later helped to establish him as a key figure in regional economic planning.19

As will become apparent, however, aside from these figures, the formal participation of academic geographers was relatively limited.

Following a conference at the Treasury on 18 March 1931, the modus operandi for the surveying was formulated. The surveyors were instructed to provide a picture of the current position of the regional economies, to point out potential ‘prospects of early expansion and new development, having regard particularly to new industrial developments within recent years’ and, thirdly, to estimate the labour ‘surplus’ in each region. Each survey team in each university was provided with a host of statistical information and reports pertinent to their region. Careful to ensure standardization, it was agreed that the surveyors should work ‘upon a uniform plan for the collection, tabulation and publication of data concerning each district within their areas’. It was agreed also to avoid any potential ‘contentious subjects’, particularly ‘the alleged unadaptibility [sic.] of the labour in the depressed areas’.20 (A scribble in the margins of the memorandum noted, ‘Old fashioned fears of some Trade Union Leaders was mentioned’).21 Following these agreements, it was decided to go public with news of the survey and its aims were publicized widely as ‘University’ surveys, with the proviso that they were being undertaken in the national interest. The response, according to the surveyors who reported back in July, was positive, though in a separate meeting in Cardiff in April it was noted that the University had been approached by Merthyr Tydfil Trades Council, demanding ‘a trade union representative should serve on any committee that was formed for the purpose of organising the Survey’.22 Marquand, who replied that ‘it was a little outside the conception of the survey to have Trade Union representatives involved’, denied the request.

It is important to note that this was not the first time the state engaged in studies into industrial change – the investigations supported by the Board of Trade into the decline of export staples such as cotton and coal being an excellent case in point. These reports, in which Raymond Streat played a significant part, fed into the concerns of the surveyors. But what is more unique about these events was the
Figure 7  New fields for Fordism

Source: Advertisement in The Times Trade and Engineering (August 1935, 10)
new emphasis placed upon the regional basis and regional solution to these problems, derived in part, as I have demonstrated, from an American model. The commencement of the surveys went hand in hand with Wilson’s complementary policy of stimulating regional organizations, mainly by bringing together local Chambers of Commerce, to focus on the question of industrial development. When Wilson wrote to the Vice Chancellors of the respective universities in each region asking for their cooperation, in each case he requested that the university should work ‘in close association with the local development organization, arguing that ‘the survey should be regarded as an integral part of the local efforts now being put forward to foster and attract new industrial developments’. Indeed, a significant amount of preparatory work had been devoted to the possibilities of establishing regional organizations, with officials from the regional offices of the Ministry of Labour given instructions to present a memorandum on what might today be termed the ‘institutional thickness’ of development activity in their respective regions. These regional organizations, established under state support, had a distinct political composition, representing in the main local business elites, though in some cases, as in Lancashire and Cumberland, there was a limited participation of trade unions. Initially, it was thought that these organizations would limit their activity to the provision of data and supporting government policy, through their contacts with local industrialists and utility and railway companies. However, as the 1930s proceeded, these organizations would bring the political use of surveys to a different level, and use the economic knowledge formed within them to criticize central government and re-position their regional economies in the national geographical imagination.

In revealing some of the arrangements and politics behind the surveys, it is possible to unveil the significance of the geographical knowledge produced, and the use that it would be put towards. In Wales, the Trade Unions clearly felt they had an investment in the survey, as they had seen how this material had been utilized before. For instance, in 1920 the Report of the South Wales Regional Survey Committee criticized the trade union movement in the region for its role in provoking industrial unrest. As commentators on the origin and intent of ‘survey’ in other cases have observed, the production and consumption of ‘survey’ was constituted through distinct power/knowledge contexts (Matless 1993; O Tuathail 1994). In this case, these industrial surveys acted as articles of statecraft. They can be read as an attempt to render some control over these regions by asserting the role of the state as the producer of knowledge on the economy. In South Wales, therefore, the Board of Trade survey reported in such a way as to correspond to national policy on unemployment. Trade Union views were excluded. Thus, on the question of ‘surplus labour’ (i.e. unemployment), the survey did not suggest government assistance for inward investment, but instead concluded that labour should ‘transfer to other parts of the country where industries are developing . . .’.24

Other regions too suddenly became acutely aware that not being surveyed might have important consequences. Having been excluded from this round of surveys, a sixth unofficial survey was made of West Cumberland, also by the Research Section of the Department of Economics and Commerce at the University of Manchester (Jewkes and Winterbottom 1933). Indicating the political significance placed on the production of these surveys as a way of representing issues and problems in the regional economy, funding for this survey was raised locally amongst business and political elites in Cumberland. An organization known as the Yorkshire Institute of Economic Affairs attempted to undertake a survey of the Yorkshire area. Mirroring the structure of the regional organizations facilitated by the Board of Trade, the institute was established in the summer of 1933 and aimed to formulate policies for Yorkshire by promoting ‘effective and intelligent opinion’ and by undertaking investigations into the problems of industry ‘in light of modern thought on economics and finance’.25

In January 1934, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds, James Ballie, requested assistance from the Ministry of Labour, to undertake an industrial survey of the West Riding of Yorkshire through the Department of Economics . . . on similar lines to those which have been made for other areas, and which were published a year or two ago.26 However, the request was denied, in part because the region was regarded as too prosperous, but also interestingly because the provision of the statistics by the Ministry of Labour would over stretch the capacity of the civil service and cost too much – over 4500 clerk hours. While at this time IBM were providing calculating machines to governments in Europe to undertake census work, none of this work in Britain was automated. Rather it involved, ‘reference to and handling of old records, of a complicated statistical character’, which new and
that led to the fall of Labour from power and the given the economic situation and the political crisis between December 1931 and February 1932, but their work.

and filing cabinets to assist with the organization of Daniels and Jewkes in the purchase of typewriters pay for the surveys and even bemoaned assisting regional surveys by themselves; the Treasury did not limits in personnel and expertise to undertake these consideration. The Board of Trade clearly had real capacity and resources of the knowledge makers, the history of the survey throws up questions about the

Yorkshire was not. More significantly, the cultural evidence of the West Riding Circles.

The outcome meant that Yorkshire was not constituted as an official region in this period and had to wait until plans and policies in the post 1945 period for its industrial needs to be considered more thoroughly. West Cumberland, on the other hand, fared much better. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that, in getting the region into the governmental domain by constructing it as a ‘depressed industrial region’ and presenting its problems to the same statistical standards as the other regions, Jewkes and Winterbottoms’ survey was critical in getting West Cumberland scheduled as a Special Area in 1934. Yorkshire’s failure and West Cumberland’s success also suggests the significance of access to knowledge brokers. West Cumberland at this time was able to draw upon experts at the Manchester School of Economics – A.R. Daniels and John Jewkes – Yorkshire was not. More significantly, the cultural history of the survey throws up questions about the capacity and resources of the knowledge makers, both at national and regional level, which at once suggests that in this period at least, the notion of an all-powerful surveillance state requires careful consideration. The Board of Trade clearly had real limits in personnel and expertise to undertake these regional surveys by themselves; the Treasury did not pay for the surveys and even bemoaned assisting Daniels and Jewkes in the purchase of typewriters and filing cabinets to assist with the organization of their work.

The Board of Trade surveys were submitted between December 1931 and February 1932, but given the economic situation and the political crisis that led to the fall of Labour from power and the establishment of the first National Government, the content of the surveys was not widely debated. As time progressed, and as the new National Government continued to reject intervention in the regional economies, the surveys did not immediately become associated with any specific policy initiatives. The surveys were, however, to help shore up official discourses on the nature of the national economy. The 1931–2 regional surveys were a measure of the degree to which the state was prepared to define and analyse the problem of mass unemployment in terms of carefully demarcated ‘depresse areas’ rather than the expression of a national economic problem.

The Ministry of Labour surveys

The problem of the depressed areas refused to go away. In 1934, once again the political device of an industrial survey was rolled into action. During the first administration of the National Government, a second set of surveys were made by a group of four investigators under the control of the Ministry of Labour, commencing in April 1934. The impetus to make these surveys came from several sources. Protest on the Left was growing; there was increased pressure from within the National Government to make some kind of response to the serious, and by now prolonged, situation developing in the ‘depressed areas’. Government action was accelerated following the intensive political debate provoked by the publication of four articles by the The Times’ labour correspondent, John Vernon Radcliff, reporting on his visit to the depressed areas. These articles were published in March 1934 in The Times under the title ‘Places Without A Future’. The interest in these articles was so great that they were discussed in parliament and later republished as a pamphlet. Radcliff visited the North East and in his reports he constructed the economic geography of these industrial districts as an affront to nationhood, and as a moral problem that a Christian nation could not tolerate. With one eye on the emerging new landscapes of production in the South, Radcliff observed that

England is beginning again to think in terms of prosperity, and may even deceive herself into imagining that at home, if only she holds what she has gained, everything is going to come right. That is not so. (Radcliff 1934)

Discussing the depressed areas, he added ‘it would be a failure of humanity to forget them, a failure of statesmanship to ignore them’ (Radcliff 1934).
In a way that anticipated the establishment of the first government agency dedicated to regional policy, known as the Special Areas Commission, later that year, Radcliff’s articles stimulated *The Times* to suggest that a ‘Director of Operations against the derelict areas’ should be appointed. This call for specific assistance was predisposed on the notion that these depressed places now existed as distinctive spaces with similar conditions and problems. It was proposed that such a person would be the channel and instrument of a concerted national effort to rid the land of these terrible pools of idleness in which manhood is slowly and fatally sinking. He would bind together the agencies of relief and amelioration and direct remedial measures with concentrated force. (Anon 1934)

Radcliff’s exposure of the grievous nature of the problems in the derelict areas in the Establishment press put the government, and especially Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, under moral pressure to come up with some sort of solution. *The Times* concluded,

...the failure to find a way, or ways of restoring the vitality of the areas and the communities which languish in them is a burden on the mind and consciousness of their fellow citizens. To politicians and political parties the distressed areas are a perplexity and a peril. (Anon 1935)

Pressured to act, the National Government’s response was to renew the surveys of the depressed areas, except that, instead of undertaking a scientific survey, they would employ a more time-honoured mechanism of appointing government investigators. These investigators were: for the North East, Euan Wallace, a Conservative MP, and Civil Lord of the Admiralty; for Cumberland, J.C.C. Davidson, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; for the depressed area in Scotland, Sir Arthur Rose, later appointed the first Commissioner for the Special Areas in Scotland; for South Wales, Sir William Portal, destined to become the chief industrial advisor to the National Government. This selection of individuals from the Conservative Party’s inner circle is significant, as the reports were initially not intended for public circulation. Only under political pressure were they published by the Ministry of Labour as Reports of the Investigation into the Industrial Conditions in Certain Depressed Areas in November 1934, seven months after the public outcry related to Radcliff’s report on Durham, and just one month before the establishment of the Special Areas Commission.28

These surveys, written as the reports of individual investigators, were more personalized than the earlier reports done by the Board of Trade. But, as with the political scenario in 1931, the investigators were under strict instruction to survey in ways that corresponded with government policy. The Treasury prepared firm instructions about what the surveys should include. Once more, encouraging labour out-migration (known as ‘Industrial Transference’) and not inward investment should be recommended. Neville Chamberlain also asked that the survey should note the ‘failures of local government’ and, given the government plans for land settlement, consider what opportunities existed for getting unemployed workers back to farming.29 Moreover, reflecting the government policy in providing a range of palliatives to the workless through the mobilization of voluntary organizations, he stressed it was important to ‘find’ evidence amongst the unemployed population of their interest in ‘occupational centres, training centres for domestic service, provision of allotments, organised games and the improvement in the outward appearance of the area’.30 This he concluded would make the unemployed ‘feel that there is something for them other that sitting or standing about’.31

Therefore, whilst the surveys can be positioned as part of the same trend that sought to ‘know’ what was going on in these ‘other’ regions, they were doing so in ways that were ideologically predetermined. If the regions were to be brought into visibility, it was to be done in politically calculated ways. The state’s use of economic geography – in the form of the regional surveys – provided a mechanism for defining and dealing with the unemployment problem without drastically altering the course of economic policy to confront the wider national economy, as was the case in the USA under the New Deal. Some of the modes of looking, learning and moralizing revealed in sensationalist treatments of the regions were preserved also within the industrial survey. In his report on the North East, Euan Wallace commended himself in his ability to ‘visit and spend some time in villages which would be typical of the worst part of the coalfield’ which, as he writes, ‘enabled me to obtain a valuable impression of what might be called the “psychological climate” of the area’.32 He criticized the earlier survey done by the Board of Trade as failing to find conclusive evidence about why no new industry came to the region, arguing, ‘the reasons tabulated there are too many and too diverse to enable definite conclusions to be...
drawn from them’. Despite their strict instructions from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, given this personal input, the surveys reflect some division about the nature and form that potential government intervention, if any, should take and hence they differed in terms of defining the extent of government action. Writing from Scotland, Arthur Rose commended the freedom of choice that had led to the development of industry proximate to markets in the South and Midlands. He concluded, ‘...any artificial direction of industry would probably prevent development’ (my emphasis). Wallace, however, was more critical, alluding to the consequences of unfeathered growth in the South. Most likely under the influence of Harold Macmillan, whose constituency was also in the North East, and whose ‘Third Way’ plans for the economy were bubbling amongst more liberal Conservative backbenchers, Wallace complained about the ‘drift’ to the South, remarking on the ‘most outstanding example of the movement of population to a new area is the industrialization and consequent rapid growth of greater London’, pointing out ‘the evils, actual and potential, of this increasing agglomeration of human beings are so generally recognised as to need no comment’.

The regional politics of economic geography

The development of regional industrial surveys and grants through the Special Areas Commission to promote industrial development at a regional level was to ensure that the issues of economic intelligence remained a political subject. In the instance of Cumberland, the survey ‘had a profound effect on local opinion’. In a completely new way, the surveys, and the regional organizations behind them, were to open up the possibilities of regional input into the running of the national economy. Whilst the governmental response to the University surveys was minimal, in the regions the surveys were used to maximum effect. Though, as in Lancashire, the Chamber of Commerce complained that the work was too academic, the value of undertaking research into the economic geography of the regions was retained, primarily as it was seen to be an effective mechanism in promoting inward industrial development and lobbying Whitehall. As such, the survey retained its political value. During the 1930s, the regional development organizations became adept at contributing to a politics of representation that sought to re-envision the character and condition of their region. In addition to lobbying the government for better funding and intervention for regional development, they produced a range of economic surveys, advertisements, books, pamphlets and films, which aimed to make visible a modern commercial geography. Under advisement from Raymond Streat, who connected the Lancashire Industrial Development Council (LIDC) to the Travel and Industrial Development Association, the organization paid large sums for the erection of posters in the London Underground, and at international exhibitions such as the Lyon International Fair, the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in 1935 and another in Belgium in 1936, where ‘the committee arranged for the erection of large sized Lancashire publicity signs adjacent to each of the five main railway lines entering Brussels’. It was thought that, ‘by this means a timely reminder of Lancashire’s industrial importance was conveyed to the hundreds of thousands of business visitors to the Exhibition from all quarters of Europe’. Another poster,

by special arrangement with the London organisation, Lancashire has been accorded the privilege of having a specially designed poster on public display at the new premises which the association has opened up on the Avenue Champs Élysée, Paris’s greatest thoroughfare. The micro locations of these advertisements in the metropolis seemed to fascinate the LIDC. The organization also congratulated itself in securing ‘an advertisement panel on the recently reconstructed left luggage office on the arrival side of Euston Station of London’ where, due to its ‘excellent position... should be seen by countless numbers of persons arriving at the station.’

Just as these activities set out to renegotiate an economic geography that scripted Lancashire as derelict or unproductive, the publication of an industrial survey was one of the central ways in which development organizations sought to re-envision their regional economies and legitimate their own status. The ability to script the regional economy became a crucial element in contributing to regional organization. The production of knowledge, in particular geographical knowledge, through the industrial surveys, became a key way of marking out the local economy and the organization’s identity within it. By making the regional economy visible on their own terms, the acquisition of authority to represent the regional economy brought with it the ability to become the local power broker, to forward
the organization's view on the regional economy and in turn pursue the organization's policy over others. If posters in central locations in European capitals envisioned the Lancashire region on an international scale, the envisioning capacity presented through the surveys offered what was termed 'ammunition to the government'. Though ostensibly written as objective scientific accounts of the regional economy, because they were produced from within the political variance of civil society in the regions, the surveys envisioned regional economies in politically situated ways. As Michael Fogarty, having later worked with these organizations on the Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey, put it:

... there was a tendency to regard a professor as nothing more than a walking encyclopedia with a limited publicity value ... but once the survey results have been produced and have been digested into a form suitable for current use, they are generally accepted willingly enough, if only because they make admirable ammunition for publicity and the battle with Whitehall. (Fogarty 1947, 56)

It is useful to consider in a little more detail how the survey was used by these organizations to re-present their regional geography, how they constituted themselves as regions and how they reworked ideas about the national economy. In Lancashire in particular – under the direction of Raymond Streat who had taken the protocols of the New England Council to heart – the importance of a survey was not neglected. In 1934 the LIDC resolved to petition the Board of Trade to renew the first industrial survey that had been conducted in the region in 1931. It was argued that 'the advantages of a new survey and probably of continued periodical surveys, are so apparent as to render any argument unnecessary'.

In November 1934, the Lord Mayor of Bootle told a meeting of the LIDC gathered in Manchester to discuss industrial development that:

I believe that if there was a Research Committee set up, so that they could visualise the change of industries from one locality to another or the introduction of new industries, so that labour could be trained, it would tend to prevent that lapse of employment ... That has been one of the failings of this country; that we have not visualised the changes which take place in industry and we have not met in an organised way the changes in the form of employment which develop from them. (my emphasis)

Given that a second round of surveys were being conducted by the government in 1934, financial support from the Board of Trade was not forthcoming, but the Mayor of Bootle's emphasis on the necessity to envision economic change illustrates very effectively the how the political value of the industrial surveys was locally understood. As with other development councils, the publication of regional industrial surveys continued. Through the LIDC's close associations with Manchester University, a second survey was published as Re-adjustment in Lancashire by members of the Economics Research Section in the University of Manchester in 1936 (Economic Research Section Manchester University 1936). Streat at this point had begun to attempt to radicalize the agenda for economists in the region. Perhaps he had in mind the geographical survey of New England edited by J.K. Wright, published on behalf of the New England Council by the American Geographical Society that had involved economic leaders, economists and geographers in developing an effective survey of the region, with plans and proposals for new development (Wright 1933). In a lecture to the Manchester Statistical Society in November 1936, he bemoaned the fact 'that there was to great a tendency for the economist and the statistician to disclaim all and every responsibility beyond the boundaries of his abstract academic function'. Instead, he argued that economists should 'concern themselves with the task of evolving theories which the world of affairs can apply' and that 'those who labour in the field of economics must accept – in the interest of society – a self discipline which would cause them to make orderly contribution to society'.

These principles certainly seemed to influence the outlook of Jewkes and Daniels in their survey. Aside from providing the information demanded by the LIDC, notably regarding the location of 'surplus labour' within the county, Re-adjustment in Lancashire engaged in a politics of representation. The survey set out to criticize not only government policy in Lancashire, but also in the country as a whole. Many of the themes found in debates and concerns about the way in which the economy and society in Lancashire was being misrepresented emerge in the survey. Of particular importance was the claim made in the survey that if industrial development was allowed to continue on a national level the changes which take place in industry and we have not met in an organised way the changes in the form of employment which develop from them. (my emphasis)

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There is a fundamental need to increase materially the rate at which industrial areas and properties are being modernised if this county is to maintain its position in the vanguard of world competition of industry. Today planning on modern lines is almost confined to new areas and if steps are not taken adequately to apply the same spirit and policy to meet the circumstances of the older areas, the tides of industry will recede from these areas leaving them a dead loss to the nation.46 (my emphasis)

Discursively, this kind of argument adopted the operational language of the powerful, arguing along conservative lines about costs, management and nationhood. The survey also operated in other ways. Reflecting the fear that the whole of Lancashire was considered as ‘derelict’, the survey constantly disaggregated the various elements of the industrial region in Lancashire. In this way the survey sought to show how the regions were effaced and misrepresented in government policy and in the press. It stated for example:

It is often convenient to deal with the whole of Lancashire as if it were one homogeneous industrial area. The importance of the cotton industry in most districts often leads to common conditions of prosperity or depression; the major industries of the county are linked together so closely that the fate of one vitally affects the others. But in some respects it is misleading and dangerous to regard Lancashire as homogeneous. Some, perhaps the majority, of the towns in Lancashire are fundamentally dependent on the cotton industry and its associates – textile engineering and textile finishing or upon the coal-mining industry. There are however, areas whose dependence upon these staples is much less marked, whose industries are much more diversified and whose fortunes are much more closely bound up with economic conditions in other parts of the country than they are with the older Lancashire industries. (Economic Research Section Manchester University 1936, 47; my emphasis)

Throughout the text, the regional economy was broken down and re-envisioned into different and distinct industrial districts. This was clearly done for two reasons. First to make a bid for Special Area status, or comparable assistance for the ‘Weaving District’ around Blackburn and Darwen and the ‘Coal Mining District’ around Wigan. Secondly, the LIDC sought to illustrate how other parts of industrial Lancashire were successful and unaffected by ‘dereliction’. Altogether, this strategy attempted to get away from the unitary notion of the North, whose potency the LIDC and the economics department at the University were aware of. The structure of these arguments offered a challenge to the ways in which the region was scripted in governmental and commercial discourses at this time.

The uses the surveys were put to follows a comparable pattern in the other regions. A similar situation occurred in South Wales, with the publication of Prof. H. Marquand’s survey of South Wales in 1937 (National Industrial Development Council of Wales and Monmouthshire 1937). Marquand himself condensed his findings in his more polemical text South Wales Needs a Plan, where he was freer to exercise political criticism, and joined in with rising national political demands for economic planning and regional assistance. In Cumberland, the survey was put to political ends too. At this point, the economic geographer, G.H.J. Daysh re-enters the scene. In 1937, while teaching geography at the university in Newcastle, he was commissioned by the Cumberland Development Council (CDC), using £1000 allocated by the Special Areas Commissioner, to conduct a survey in Cumberland. But Daysh was commissioned only when the CDC’s request for the University of Manchester to repeat their earlier survey of 1933 was diplomatically refused. Manchester University’s loyalty at this point was to the Lancashire Industrial Development Council, whose relations with the CDC, with whom it saw itself in direct competition for inward investment, were far from cordial.46 At this time, Daysh was also working with the North East Development Board, promoting industrial development there and was part of the team responsible for producing A Survey of Industrial Facilities of the North-East Area (North-East Development Board 1937). Daysh, however, agreed to undertake the survey in Cumberland, driving regularly over the Pennines that summer to Carlisle in his Austin Seven. First published in 1938, this report was widely circulated in industrial circles. Daysh was to later publish a chapter based upon the survey in his landmark text on regional economic planning, Studies in Regional Planning (Daysh 1949). The whole survey was republished with additional information in 1951 as Cumberland: with special reference to the West Cumberland Area: A Survey of Industrial Facilities (Daysh and Watson 1938). This work and others like it exist at the beginning of a lineage of regional economic monographs, best illustrated in a series entitled ‘Industrial Britain’ that involved up to date economic geography monographs published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, i.e. Graham Humphrey’s South Wales (Humphreys 1972).
Economic geographies of Britain 1930–1939

Figure 8 Envisioning modernization

Source: An invitation to industrialists from Wonderful West Cumberland Whitehaven Record Office, YDX 165
At this point in the 1930s, Daysh’s role and that of other academic geographers begins to become more significant. In March 1938, Daysh was instructed to present his survey material before a new commission – the Royal Commission into the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population, more commonly known as the Barlow Commission.47 The Barlow Commission was established on the recommendation of the Special Areas Commission to investigate issues of national planning and was of critical importance in legitimizing debate and possibilities about social and economic planning in national life. In doing so it offered a broad range of organizations in state and civil society the chance to air their views about the potential of spatial and economic planning. In Cumberland, this was read as an opportunity to argue rationally for more state intervention in the region.48 Whilst the Cumberland Survey was put to effective use in arguing out the case for regional development to the Barlow Commission, in a way that demonstrates the commercial value placed on the survey and the somewhat fluid ways in which such forms of economic geography were put to work, an industrial booklet was also published that simplified the survey for promotional purposes. This was regarded as:

\[
\text{... a supplementary to the industrial survey at present being carried out and to some extent based upon it. The object being of this booklet will be to show industrialists why they should establish their undertaking in the areas and to emphasize as far as possible the good features of the district while minimizing any gloomy aspect which the more academic survey may disclose.}^{49}
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In its imagery, the modern factory in the country is clearly presented and the region’s peripherality downplayed by de-contextualizing the map of Cumberland from the rest of the UK and overemphasizing the significance of a regional airport at Carlisle. The pamphlet projected an ideal economic geography, accentuating the availability of modern factories on green-field sites and the health and strength of the local labour force (Figure 8). The emphasis placed on the healthy ‘type’ reworked descriptions of the inhabitants of Cumberland that reflected the influence of the work of H.G. Fleure in Daysh’s own conception of regional geography.50 The pamphlet also promoted Cumberland as a friendly place where cooperation and partnership from the local authorities would be forthcoming:

Throughout West Cumberland the public authorities are determined to leave no stone unturned to make the road easy and ultimate success certain. From north to south there is an earnest desire to assist industrialists to develop the resources of the district and employ the ample and adaptable labour available. Factory sites are available amidst almost sylvan surroundings, within easy distance of towns and shopping centres. Water, power, road, rail and sea transport suffice to meet any demands to be made upon them.51

Fifteen thousand copies of these pamphlets were produced, and given the large volume and the high cost of such forms of publicity, detailed management of the schemes was put into place. The Council hired the London Press Exchange – publisher of the *Home Market* – to assist in placing favourable articles in the national press. However, the publicity committee soon developed doubts as to the ‘advertising value of the service rendered by them and their ability to carry out their promises relating to their influence and ability to have publicity material inserted in the *Daily Press*.52 Seeking value for money, they discharged their services. They interviewed two possible advertising agencies, Grass and Courtney of Manchester and Pritchard Wood and Partners London, a company that had organized an exhibition of the Special Areas in the London Underground (Linehan forthcoming). Despite Pritchard’s goodwill to the Commission, they hired the company from Manchester and proceeded with the publication of 40 000 folders in English and ‘foreign languages’ advertising tourist amenities in the area.53 Other activities are also recorded. It ‘was resolved that enquiries be made through the secretaries of the Trade Associations’ on the possibility of developing Cumberland as a conference centre and to ‘find out the extent of the inducements that might be offered’.54 Seeking favourable exposure in the press, in May 1938, they paid the expenses of Mr Muller, their publicity officer to travel to Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle to ‘interview copy-tasters for the Northern Dailies’. The CDC also promoted the region directly abroad and a ‘visit to Budapest and Hungary brought 30 enquiries’.55 Before the outbreak of war in 1939, the organization also planned to go to the USA to encourage the location of branch plants in the region.56 In 1939, a further 40 000 copies of this industrial folder and another brochure devised for the tourist market – *This Wonderful West Cumberland* – were sent to the World Fair in New York. Daysh, however, got to stay in Newcastle.
The Labour Party surveys and socialist geographies

The activities of the regional development councils are clearly very important in the ways they demonstrate the various arenas in which economic geography was produced, and put to work. Of equal significance, another example of the political work of economic geography comes from the Labour Party’s survey of the Distressed Areas (Dalton et al. 1937). This survey illustrated the political capacity of the research section of the Labour Party lead by G.D.H. Cole, who, through the New Fabian Research Bureau, from the early 1930s, had been producing a range of information and alternative policies for use as propaganda and party-political rebuttal against the National Government. The idea for the survey originated at the annual conference, from a delegate in Whitehaven in West Cumberland, and it is difficult not to see the hand of Jack Adams in the exercise. It was somewhat typical of the political astuteness of Adams to, on the one hand, take funding from the National Government’s Special Areas fund, and then seek to undermine it by supporting a new survey that could only protest at the effectiveness of the Special Areas policy. The survey began in earnest in the autumn of 1936, with conferences in regional centres such as Cardiff and Glasgow. From the beginning, the survey was a political exercise. As an envisioning instrument, its main political author, the Labour MP Hugh Dalton, used the survey to mobilize opinion and he engaged the press throughout, notably the *Daily Herald* whose journalists travelled with him, to ‘get the widest possible publicity to this wicked national scandal’ (Dalton 1946, 119). Dalton was able to draw upon his experience as a lecturer in economics at London School of Economics, and later as a Reader in Economics at the University of London, but as a politician was able to politicize the survey results effectively. The outcome according to Dalton – who in the postwar government became the Chancellor of the Exchequer – was ‘most rewarding in its effects on the spirit of our movement in these areas, and on public opinion throughout the country’ (Dalton 1946, 119). The survey effectively mobilized a critical economic geography of the depressed areas to make the economy visible in socialist terms. In doing so, it conjoined with other left-wing critiques, published through the 1930s, in a concerted effort to represent the problems of the distressed areas to the British public.57

Moreover, in comparison to the reaction of locals to seemingly ineffective and distant official government surveys and investigations, working largely in overwhelmingly Labour constituencies, Dalton endeavoured to ensure that the Labour Party survey was represented as more politically attuned to the needs and aspirations of local people. This policy was ensured through public meetings with members of the local party, where submissions about the local economy and hopes for reconstruction were presented for consideration. The surveyors monopolized their capacity to gain such insights from the local labour movement very effectively, and the investigation was widely appreciated amongst the labour movement for the forum it provided for political protest about local economic conditions. For instance, in Wigan, the press applauded the manner of the Labour Party’s investigation into the condition of the Distressed Areas. Plans for reconstruction on socialist lines were praised and it was noted that the Labour Party was in earnest in the matter, and was anxious to mobilise public opinion not only in the distressed areas, but throughout the country to demand that the government . . . face up to its responsibility. (Anon 1937b)

Throughout the country, travelling by car – and occasionally by boat – the surveyors maximized their exposure in the industrial regions by undertaking intensive rounds of fieldwork. As a result of these public encounters with the landscapes of dereliction, the legitimacy of the surveys was never placed in doubt. In Newcastle, the *News Chronicle* observed that the Labour Party, which has been visiting Tyneside, cannot fairly be classed amongst those unofficial – and unwanted – investigators who periodically descend upon the area, take a bus ride to Jarrow and write sensationally of the troubles of a community to which London owes a great deal. (Anon 1937a)

Party surveyors were contrasted with the distant gaze of the National Government. H.R.S. Philpott, the *Daily Herald* correspondent who travelled with Dalton on his ‘pilgrimage’ to the distressed areas, praised in particular this approach of the socialist commissioners for getting ‘down to the job’:

They travelled hundreds of miles through snowstorms, gales and blizzards. They met the common people in their pitiful apologies for homes and their little clubs. They threshed out matters with local councils many of whose members have been unemployed for years . . . They met men who thought it amazing that anyone from London or Parliament should bother to come to talk to them at all. (Philpott 1937, 194)
This more hands-on approach is characteristic of left-wing interventions into survey. The journal *Fact* demanded that its investigations into unemployment must not neglect the ‘human element’ and complained that ‘expert surveys have in the past suffered from their own diseases of which the chief is unreadability’ (Anon 1937c, 4). Margaret and G.D.H. Cole reiterated this perspective in their book, *The Condition of Britain*, where they argued against apolitical specialist and technical language. Mirroring the intentions of the radical statistican and designer Otto Neurath, they maintained that

most things which it is important for ordinary people to know can be stated in untechnical language; and most statistics can be set out in forms which involve no mathematics beyond the elementary rules of arithmetic. (Cole and Cole 1937, 17)

Ensuring it took a popular form, in January 1937 the Labour Party published an *Interim Report: Labour and the Distressed Areas: a programme of immediate action*. In it, they usurped a purple passage from an increasingly critical *Times* and condemned the view that these areas should be considered as economic cemeteries, the character of which may be made more pleasant by planting a few flowers, straightening a few tombstones, and employing a new sexton or two, but cannot be radically changed. The condition of the Special Areas is a challenge to the efficiency of the government and of the democratic system.

The interim report was followed by five regional reports: on West Cumberland, Durham and the East Coast, on South Wales, Central Scotland and Lancashire. In contrast to the official government publications, and drawing upon popular imagery of these regions, each cover depicted a labourer ‘strongly built, leaning against a wall, his hands at his pockets, gazing at nothing’ (Dalton 1946, 120). The surveys were published in stages throughout 1937, to maximize publicity and political pressure, and at a moment when the economic orthodoxies of the Treasury was beginning to crumble, the surveys found many willing supporters. For the Labour MP Manny Shinwell, in propaganda terms, the survey was ‘finest thing done by the Party in recent years’.

He contrasted the ‘outspoken’ Labour Party reports with the ‘mealy-mouthed recommendations’ of the Special Areas Commissioners. He thought the survey mobilized the socialist movement throughout the country, re-connected Transport House to the people and provided a ‘devastating’ analysis of the position of the Distressed Areas that would provide a Labour government with a guide to new legislation. In writing these own critical economic geographies, the Labour Party attempted to argue different pathways of intervention, action and control to the National Government. In doing so, the reports were able to align themselves with the growing demand for national economic planning and in doing so were able to answer the demands of their constituency whilst demonstrating the Party’s fitness for government.

**Conclusion**

In terms of the political use of economic geography, this material demonstrates very effectively that we need to continue to consider the ‘economic’ in economic geography. This paper has demonstrated how the interplay between ideas, political calculations and different organized interests shaped the use of geographical knowledge to produce, represent and challenge notions of the economy and economic space. These intellectual developments accompanied and interacted with broader discursive changes that constructed ‘the region’ as a new object of enquiry and governance. Eventually, the surveys helped to bring the region into a new space of governmentality for the operation of new powers of planning, regulation, statistical enumeration and representation. The result was a particular representation of regional problems and particular modes of policy intervention that survived well up to the early 1980s, having a profound effect on the shaping and imagining of the space economy. It is clear also at this time that academic economic geographers were not the only people producing economic geography. The regional surveys and the commercial geographies of interwar Britain enrolled a wide diversity of political opinion, techniques and activities and became inscribed with power. These histories suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the role different economic geographies played in producing economic and geographic knowledge that was both politically situated and consumed.

As I hope this paper has shown, while they differed greatly, the economic geographies of the Labour Party and those of the regional development
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Councils came together in their critique of the National Government at the end of the 1930s. The political capacity of the instrument of survey and the mobilization of geographical knowledge about the economy in both instances was critical. This situation mirrors the political potential of survey in other times in British history, where ‘survey was an institution around which political debate coalesced’ (Freeman 2000, 213). In this period, each took the state surveys of 1931 and 1934 to task, and in making the regional economy visible in a generally oppositional way, contested national economic policy. Discourses about market-led development, modernization and commercial success constructed by the state and by industrial publications like Business had a special significance for the regions. Organizations like the LIDC were conscious that the construction of a ‘northern myth’ of decline, and industrial unrest, had real material consequences, particularly in terms of inward investment. During this period these regional groups became adept at contributing to a politics of representation that sought to re-envision the character and condition of their region. Their aim to produce a range of economic surveys, advertisements, books, pamphlets and film, made visible a modern regional geography. Through their publicity campaigns and through political lobbying, they attempted to moderate the negative economic impacts of the discourses of confidence and modernization that had emerged from the representations of new industrial districts in the South and the Midlands of England. Re-envisioning the region enrolled the instruments of economic geography throughout. Guided by the entrepreneurial intentions of individuals like Raymond Streat, or the socialist ambitions of Hugh Dalton, such strategies of re-invention were the pathways by which the industrial regions sought inclusion in the modern economies of the ‘New England’.

Throughout this period the direct intervention of the academic economic geographer was limited to a handful, mainly because there were relatively few trained specialists employed at British Universities. Whilst it is true that economic geographers engaged more intensively with policy issues after the Second World War, the discipline’s claims for objectivity meant that the history outlined here was largely lost when economic geography migrated into the distinguished undergraduate textbooks of the post-war period. The shift to spatial science in particular disentangled the discipline from the commercial and politicized world typical of the economic geographies of the interwar period. However, by working over the lateral associations of geographical knowledge, a different version of the nature of the discipline and its social contexts is uncovered. Despite the limits of the discipline to engage, these contexts remain critical to understanding how the identity and role of the discipline was forged in Britain. To this day, engaging with local and regional organizations and presenting a critical perspective on the nature of economic developments remain a key activity amongst many economic geographers. Equally, the significance of economic geography as a powerful mode of intervention needs to be appreciated through these histories, and perhaps in contemporary contexts reappraised by some contemporary thinkers in the discipline who are dismissive of the wider engagement with economic geography by non-economic geographers. We need to remember that Streat advertised the regional surveys of Lancashire on the back-cover of the in-flight-magazines of Imperial Airways, and placed copies in elitist and prestigious London clubs and the first class smoking rooms of trans-Atlantic ocean liners. Similarly, the Labour Party’s pamphlets on the economic geographies on the industrial regions passed from reader to reader in the network of labour clubs established by the Miner Welfare Committee up and down the country and socialist maps of unemployment were fly-posted outside public events on the streets of Manchester and many other northern cities and towns. In this light, it seems we need to continue to recover the pathways of geographical knowledge through these and other sites of power and political engagement, to unfold a firmer understanding of the genealogy of regional survey and economic geography and its place in the world.

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Notes

1 Report of Raymond Streat’s visit to America and Canada in May 1931, Minutes of the Lancashire
Industrial Development Council, LIDC 1931–1932
Vol. 1. Papers of the Lancashire Industrial Development Council, Manchester Central Library, M199.

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Depressed Areas conference on University Surveys notes on conference at the Treasury Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) LAB 14/18.
7 I am indebted to Ron Martin for these observations.
12 Business July 1928, 26. The use of the ‘weather-map’ emphasized the popular nature of the representation, while also adopting a common and enduring economic metaphor.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 All of these reports were published by the Board of Trade, The Lancashire Areas 51196, Merseyside 51193, The North East Coast Area 51194, Scotland 51191, South Wales 51192. Source ‘Industrial Surveys’, Consolidated list of Government Publications, 1st January to 31st December 1932, HMSO, London.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 For further insight into the institutional arrangements in the North East during this period see Beynon et al. (1994).
20 Note of a Conference between representatives of the Universities and the various government departments on the industrial survey of the depressed areas held at the Treasury on 18 March 1931, PRO LAB 14/18.
21 Ibid.
22 Industrial Survey Meeting at Cardiff, 23 April 1931, PRO LAB 14/18.
23 Letter from Wilson to W.H. Moberly, VC Manchester University, 25 March 1931, PRO LAB 14/18.
24 Board of Trade South Wales 51192, HMSO, London. 148.
26 Letter from Bailie to Flood, Dept of Labour, 29 January 1934, PRO LAB 2/2179/STATS/434.
27 H. Betterton, Minister of Labour, Hanzard, 19 April 1934.
29 Derelict Areas Investigation outline instructions prepared by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, PRO MAF 8/94.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid. 83.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Mr G. Gibson, LIDC, 22 November 1934, Promoting New Industrial Development in Lancashire, Development Council’s Plans Announced at Special Meeting. Papers of the Lancashire Industrial Development Council, Manchester Central Library, MCL M199.
44 Ibid.
45 Lancashire Industrial Development Council 1936, Draft Memorandum on ‘Modernisation of Industrial Area’, prepared to be sent to the Minister of Health Sir Kingsley Wood. Papers of the Lancashire Industrial Development Council, Manchester Central Library, M199.
46 For instance, in 1943, Hugh Dalton, President of the Board of Trade, was forced to intervene in a dispute
over cooperation on a war-time industrial survey which had arisen between the two organizations. John Adams of the CDC had refused to work beneath Bennett Storey of the LIDC, and had strong misgivings about Storey’s commitment to West Cumberland, PRO BT 64/3128.


48 Though I do not have space to deal with this here, it was to this Commission that Eva Taylor submitted on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society – fighting off an attempt of her rival in the society Dudley Stamp to steal the honour to do so – a special report which introduced one of the first economic geography models, known as the Axial Belt, to explain the organization of the industrialization in the national space economy. The history of the axial belt, and its controversies in the Royal Geographical Society really need to be told in an essay by themselves. As later argued by J.N.L. Baker and E.W. Gilbert, this conception of urban and economic development evolved into a doctrinaire position and was adopted, despite its shortcomings, as a key component of the report of the Barlow Commission. See Baker and Gilbert (1944).

49 CDC, Minutes of the Publicity Committee, Carlisle Record Office, DSO 42/1/3.

50 See, for example, Daysh (1937b), who discusses the racial characteristics of the ‘North-Eastern Race’. The Tyneside speech, even among educated people, is its most singular racial characteristic. Its sing-song cadence is reminiscent of a Scandinavian speaking English. To listen to a group of miners, squatting Chinese fashion on their heels, as is their custom, is to hear a foreign tongue’.

51 CDC, 1936, An Invitation to Industrialists from Wonderful West Cumberland, Whitehaven, DSO 42/1/3.

52 Minutes of the Publicity Committee of the CDC, Carlisle Record Office, DSO 42/1/3.

53 Annual Reports and General Meetings 1936–1939, Cumberland Development Council Ltd, Carlisle Record Office, DSO 42/1/1.

54 Minutes of the Publicity Committee, Carlisle Record Office, DSO 42/1/3.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Most notable amongst this large range of texts is Hannington (1937).

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