

The Conservative Member of Parliament as Lobbyist for Constituency Economic Interests

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Interviews undertaken in the House of Commons with 70 backbench Conservative MPs in 1983–84 examined the extent to which they pursue their own localized industrial policy strategies as part of their efforts to maintain constituency electoral support. This involves lobbying efforts directed toward ministers in support of local industries, either in defence of jobs, in promotion of new jobs, or in a variety of quests for government benefits or relaxation of restrictions. It was found that 36 of the 70 Conservative MPs could be classified as ‘constituency lobbyists’, reflecting interview evidence that they consider lobbying on behalf of local industries to be a normal and important part of their representative rôle as MPs. The hypothesis that vulnerable constituencies—vulnerable in both political and economic terms—would be represented by constituency lobbyists was tested through the construction of an index of constituency ‘security’. It was found that the more secure the constituency, the less likely is the MP to lobby on behalf of local industrial interests.

The apparent growth in the significance of locality as an element in British politics has attracted the attention of both British and American scholars. A restraining factor has been the overlying traditional textbook treatment of the British polity, which discounts the territorial dimension in British politics. For American scholars this treatment has undoubtedly been influenced by the obviously greater rôle that geography plays in the politics of a country of continental size. This has, as Cainz, Ferejohn and Fiorina have recently pointed out, tended to paint the differences ‘in bold relief’. ‘Strong tendencies become

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incontrovertible generalizations, and traces of inconsistent evidence seem to disappear.¹

The most noteworthy surfacing of territory-related political behaviour has been the trend, identified most systematically by John Curtice and Michael Steed, away from uniform geographical swings in British general elections, with the accompanying decline up to 1979 in the number of marginal constituencies.² The north–south and rural–urban divisions in British politics, always of relevance, have become more pronounced in the last seven elections compared with those before 1964.³ According to Curtice and Steed, since 1955 the pattern has been ‘the North and urban areas moving cumulatively towards Labour and the South and rural areas cumulatively towards the Conservatives’.⁴

Some would tend to minimize the degree to which the voter pays attention to regional or local issues in deciding how to vote, or the candidate for Parliament regards such issues as worth pushing. Cain and his colleagues have provided a corrective with their comparative study of the constituency activities of incumbent MPs and Congressmen.⁵ This followed earlier studies that had revealed the fact that significant numbers of MPs spend important parts of their time in servicing constituents’ needs, engaging in weekly or bi-weekly Saturday-morning advice bureaux, or hearing constituents’ individualized problems (largely involving very specific family economic concerns).⁶ The earlier studies has discounted the possibility that MPs engaged in such practices for electoral reasons, since they could not expect to pick up many votes when the voters were likely to vote along party, or else national, lines in any event.⁷ For their part, Cain *et al.* found that a significant proportion of MPs thought a ‘personal vote’ could be gained by such activity, although obviously not one that could shore up a marginal seat against a strong swing in the wrong direction.⁸ Yet during the four or five years between elections, MPs cannot afford to make assumptions about the size of the next swing, since parties’ fortunes oscillate wildly between elections. The safest course in a marginal, or even a semi-safe constituency is to assume that the swing will be such that one’s own behaviour could make a difference to the result. Such uncertainties have

¹ B. E. Cain, J. A. Ferejohn and M. P. Fiorina, ‘The constituency service base of the personal vote for US Representatives and British Members of Parliament’, *American Political Science Review*, 78 (1984), 110–25.

² J. Curtice and M. Steed, ‘Electoral choice and the production of government: the changing operation of the electoral system in the United Kingdom since 1955’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 12 (1985), 249–98.

³ Curtice and Steed, ‘Electoral choice and the production of government’, p. 256.

⁴ Curtice and Steed, ‘Electoral choice and the production of government’, p. 258. See also R. M. Punnett, ‘Regional partisanship and the legitimacy of British Governments 1868–1983’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 37 (1984), 141–59.

⁵ Cain *et al.*, ‘The constituency service basis of the personal vote’.

⁶ For a recent summary see J. W. Marsh, ‘Representation changes: the constituency MP’, in Philip Norton (ed.), *Parliament in the 1980s* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 69–93.

⁷ R. E. Dowse, ‘The MP and his surgery’, *Political Studies*, 11 (1963), 333–41; R. Munroe, ‘The Member of Parliament as representative: the view from the constituency’, *Political Studies*, 25 (1977), 577–87.

⁸ B. E. Cain, J. A. Ferejohn and M. P. Fiorina, ‘The House is not a home: British MPs in their constituencies’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 4 (1979), 501–23.

been magnified in many cases by the emergence of the Liberal–Social Democratic Alliance. Cain and his colleagues cite survey results indicating that voters, especially non-party identifiers, are concerned about whether or not their MP is active in promoting their interests, and that the views of voters about the incumbent MP in marginal constituencies are somewhat more positive than those of voters in safe constituencies.⁹ This accords with their finding that MPs in marginal constituencies are in fact more actively involved in constituency matters than MPs in safe constituencies.¹⁰

Donald D. Searing has presented findings from a 1972–73 set of interviews with 338 MPs which explored norms and rôle perceptions of MPs as participants in the legislative process and as constituency representatives.¹¹ In certain respects Searing's findings regarding MP's rôle perceptions as constituency representatives parallel those of Cain and associates. Constituency service is regarded as the primary rôle by one-quarter, rivalling that of ministerial aspirant (25 per cent), easily outdistancing that of server of Parliament's internal needs (9 per cent), but in turn outdistanced by the rôle of 'supporting and criticizing the executive' (40 per cent).¹² Searing also reports, however, that, when asked very broad questions about what their most important duties and responsibilities were, nearly 60 per cent of the respondents gave a central place to the 'redress of individual grievances' of their constituents.¹³ This finding would seem to provide support for the importance which Cain *et al.* have attributed to the casework function. Searing does not, however, provide support for their proposition that constituency work is electorally motivated. He finds that 'safeness of seat has no linear relationship to whether or not backbenchers choose this rôle'.¹⁴

Searing's study was undertaken half a decade earlier than the study by Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina. In the interim, Britain went through the worst period of economic ill-fortune undergone since the 1930s, saw the rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, and experienced the almost forgotten (in 1973) phenomenon of a 'hung Parliament'. The future was to reveal even higher levels of unemployment and the emergence of the Social Democratic Party and the electoral challenge of the Alliance. In retrospect, it may not be surprising that a study in the late 1970s found that the political vulnerability of constituencies had a greater impact on MPs' rôle perceptions and behaviour than was found in a study undertaken in the early 1970s. One important feature of Searing's work is a distinction he draws between two types of constituency members—those who concentrate on serving the needs of individual constituents and those who are more attentive to the collective needs of the constituency. By the latter, which he terms 'local promoters', as opposed to 'welfare officers', he means those who engage in activities on behalf of 'local factories, disablement centers,

⁹ B. E. Cain, 'Blessed be the tie that unbinds: constituency work and the vote swing in Great Britain', *Political Studies*, 31 (1983), 103–11.

¹⁰ B. E. Cain, J. A. Ferejohn and M. P. Fiorina, 'The constituency component: a comparison of service in Great Britain and the United States', *Comparative Political Studies*, 16 (1983), 67–91.

¹¹ D. D. Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member and the practice of representation in Great Britain', *Journal of Politics*, 47 (1985), 348–91.

¹² Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member', p. 353.

¹³ Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member', p. 369.

¹⁴ Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member', p. 374.

comprehensive schools, hospitals, or other institutions'.¹⁵ In other words, each such activity is designed to enhance the interests of groups of constituents, rather than of individuals or individual families taken *seriatim*. Of the 25 per cent classified as constituency members, only 15 per cent were local promoters, as against 75 per cent placed in the welfare officer category and 10 per cent regarded as mixed. Thus, less than four per cent of the total sample are found in the local promoter category.¹⁶ One could conclude from Searing's findings that while many MPs find the welfare concerns of their constituency work to be an important preoccupation, only a few see the constituency as an economic whole to be defended and promoted.

Work by Roy Gregory, also undertaken in the 1970s, examined the possible rôle of ministers in promoting and defending collective as well as individual interests of their own constituents. He found the ministers' rôle to be circumscribed by informal restraining norms. However, such restraints should not apply to backbench MPs.¹⁷ Searing and Gregory are not out of accord with the weight of scholarly opinion in the 1980s.

The predominant view is expressed at length by Richard Rose in his work on 'the territorial dimension' in British politics. According to Rose, the 'functional' principle takes precedence over the 'territorial' principle in British policy-making.¹⁸ For example, in the domain of industrial policy, the ministries epitomizing the territorial principle, the Scottish and Welsh offices, make policy only within limits prescribed by the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, functional ministries.¹⁹ Again, the MP is more functionally than territorially orientated in his approach to policy-making.²⁰ Constituency interests, as such, are of secondary importance to the MPs, according to Rose.²¹ Indeed, one could argue that MPs' efforts on behalf of individual constituents are of a functional, rather than territorial, nature. If the MP is making an inquiry into a housing decision by a local authority, or helping an Asian immigrant with an appeal against a Home Office ruling, he or she is acting in a functional domain in much the same way as any MP. What, then, is a constituency concern that would distinguish it from the wide variety of functional concerns involved in policy-making?

It may be suggested that area-specific interests are those that involve material values that (a) are shared by all, or at least many, of the inhabitants of a given area; (b) are shared by members of different social classes, ethnic, religious, age and sex groups; and (c) are not necessarily shared by inhabitants of other areas. This suggests a different perspective on industrial policy from Richard Rose's. Industrial policy allocations have all the above characteristics because, whether targeted to specific industrial sectors, specific firms, or specific regions or localities, they are intended to (and do) affect inhabitants of different areas of

¹⁵ Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member', p. 359.

¹⁶ Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member', p. 355.

¹⁷ R. Gregory, 'Executive power and constituency representation in United Kingdom politics', *Political Studies*, 28 (1980), 63–83; see also footnote 29.

¹⁸ R. Rose, *The Territorial Dimension in Government: Understanding the United Kingdom* (Chatham, N.J., Chatham House Publishing, 1982), Chs 2–5.

¹⁹ Rose, *The Territorial Dimension in Government*, p. 102.

²⁰ Rose, *The Territorial Dimension in Government*, p. 88.

²¹ Rose, *The Territorial Dimension in Government*, pp. 88–90.

the country in different ways.²²

If functionalism prevails in the division lobbies, it would still not follow that concern for constituency economic needs does not manifest itself in other aspects of the MP's rôle. For example, regional policies designed to channel investment funds away from the south and the Midlands, and into Scotland, Wales, and the north of England, may not look the same to Labour MPs from inner London or Birmingham and to ones from inner Glasgow or Newcastle. Indeed, they might draw quite opposite conclusions about what is in the best 'working class interest' as far as regional policy is concerned. Similarly, some form of protection against international competition is seen as necessary by MPs (Conservative as well as Labour) from certain areas in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire, where wool or cotton textiles have traditionally been the prevailing industry. MPs from mixed industrial areas and from booming high-tech 'Silicon Valleys' are less likely to see it that way.²³ According to Peter Riddell, the Conservative party 'has often been protectionist in the past. Every trade, industry and regional Question Time or debate in the Commons tends to be dominated by special pleading for local interests and industries.'²⁴

An influential work which stresses the centrality of interest group-bureaucracy networks in the British economic policy-making process, while playing down the importance of Parliament, acknowledges that MPs do take an active interest in their constituencies' economic needs.²⁵ Richardson and Jordan acknowledge that MPs can sometimes block items from getting on the policy-making agenda.²⁶ They have access to ministers directly, or indirectly through their backbench party committees. Larger regional interests might have an impact in this way, such as Welsh or Scottish superregional sentiment, or the needs of the automobile industry with its heavy concentration in the West Midlands. And, of course, it has long been observed that MPs sponsored by certain trade unions, such as the National Union of Mineworkers, or those representing constituencies heavily dependent on shipbuilding or fishing, lobby on behalf of industries that are not evenly distributed around the country.²⁷

But Richardson and Jordan do not believe that MPs have much impact on the details of policy implementation, given that their access point is usually a minister responsible for the generalities of a policy area and that the details are left up to civil servants.²⁸ The latter seek to insulate the process of policy implementation from ministerial intervention, encasing it in rules which provide only limited discretion, and therefore allow ministers, and by inference MPs, little leverage.²⁹ Interest groups concerned with blocking innovation are entrenched

²² J. Zysman, *Governments, Markets and Growth: Financial Systems and the Politics of Industrial Change* (London, Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 83–7.

²³ Generalizations about the orientations of MPs, when not attributed to other sources, are based on interviews with Members of Parliament; see footnote 33, below.

²⁴ Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Government* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1983), p. 169.

²⁵ J. J. Richardson and A. G. Jordan, *Governing under Pressure: The Policy Process in a Post-Parliamentary Democracy* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1979), pp. 124–7.

²⁶ Richardson and Jordan, *Governing under Pressure*, p. 135.

²⁷ S. H. Beer, *British Politics in the Collectivist Age* (New York, Vintage Books, 1969), p. 379.

²⁸ Richardson and Jordan, *Governing under Pressure*, Ch. 3.

²⁹ B. W. Hogwood, 'The regional dimension of industrial policy', in P. Madgwick and R. Rose (eds), *The Territorial Dimension in United Kingdom Politics* (London, Macmillan, 1982), pp. 9–32. Roy Gregory has presented evidence to suggest that civil servants are a formidable

either as consultants to the civil servants or as actual administrators of certain policy domains 'hived off' to them.³⁰ So at the micro-level of policy, functionalism prevails and territorialism is nowhere to be found. Some writers suggest that the MP provides a normal channel of access for smaller and medium-sized firms in trouble.³¹ But if Richardson and Jordan are right, when such a firm is threatened with collapse, the MP can go to the minister, but the minister will not be able to pull the appropriate strings fast enough to get the proper decisions made at the proper levels to save the firm.³²

MPs as Lobbyists for Constituency Interests

If those writers who have examined MPs' activity on behalf of constituency interests are correct, then we should not expect to see MPs spending much of their time and energy pursuing 'localized industrial policies' proceeding from purely territorial, as opposed to functional, concerns, since such efforts would be instrumentally futile and electorally unproductive. This expectation was tested on the basis of interviews undertaken in 1983–84 with 70 backbench Conservative MPs.³³ Respondents were asked whether they had made representations to ministers on behalf of firms in their constituencies or travel-to-work areas, how often such representations were made, what sorts of needs of firms they served, with what responses the representations met, and what other sorts of activities they engaged in on behalf of these industries at Westminster or in their localities. Of the 70 MPs interviewed, 48 said they had made representations directly to ministers on local economic matters. One-quarter of the 48, however, mentioned such contacts in the context of rôle descriptions suggesting that the contacts were isolated instances. The three-quarters who

inhibiting factor against ministers making or seeking departmental decisions in favour of their own constituents. But an implication of his argument is that it would be more difficult for a minister to obtain treatment favourable to his own constituents than it would to favour constituents of backbench parliamentary colleagues, who are not inhibited by norms of ministerial accountability. Gregory, 'Executive power and constituency representation', pp. 77–9.

³⁰ Richardson and Jordan, *Governing under Pressure*, Ch. 3.

³¹ P. Norton, *The Commons in Perspective* (New York, Longman, 1981), p. 219; W. Grant and D. Marsh, *The Confederation of British Industry* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), pp. 113–15.

³² Cf. S. Wilks, 'Liberal state and party competition: Britain', in K. Dyson and S. Wilks (eds), *Industrial Crisis: A Comparative Study of the State and Industry* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1983), pp. 140–1.

³³ The 70 interviews with Conservative MPs were part of the larger set of 147 interviews, which included 62 Labour Members, 11 Liberals and 4 Social Democrats. The open-ended interview questions were posed in two parts: first, MPs were asked about their orientations to a range of economic policy issues; secondly, they were asked about the economic characteristics of their constituencies and the extent to which they were active in promoting and supporting the interests of local firms. The second set of questions is the one that is particularly relevant to the present analysis. The sample of 70 Conservatives is representative of the 316 backbench Conservative MPs in the House of Commons at the time the interviews took place. The sample follows closely the distribution of Conservative backbenchers as far as seat marginality, level of unemployment in the constituency, and region in which the constituency is located are concerned. There are a few discrepancies with respect to the percentages of manual workers and workers in the manufacturing sector, but they are not serious. With respect to length of tenure in the House of Commons there is a tendency for MPs in the middle range of tenure to be overrepresented and for the most senior to be underrepresented, but, again, the differences in percentage are not severe.

remained, or 36 of the 70 MPs, indicated that such contacts are a normal part of the representative rôle. These were coded as constituency lobbyists. It can be inferred from this that the lobbying phenomenon itself is quite widespread and that, in extending to just over half of the MPs in the sample, the rôle of constituency lobbyist is part of many Conservative MPs' rôle definitions.

Constituency economic lobbying by MPs is not confined to interventions with ministers. MPs lobby and are lobbied by the head offices of firms with plants or offices in their constituencies, as well as firms that might be enticed to make a move into the area. Local authorities, local business groups, trade unions and individual firms often turn to the MP for help in convincing a central government official to make a favourable ruling on a matter of concern to them. The official contacted is usually a minister. Indeed, the senior or appropriate junior minister is regarded as the proper point of access. In cases where the discretion is normally left to civil servants, for example, in regional offices of the Department of Trade and Industry, a ministerial telephone call might expedite the decision. As one veteran Scottish MP, whose access point was a minister in the Scottish Office, described his rôle:

So often I have found myself being the project manager, and yet not either having the time to do it or perhaps the necessary detailed knowledge; but in this case we're talking about I spent a fortnight on it, trying to find out who was going to take the next decision, and I think the Member of Parliament traditionally is very vital and really is able to open doors. People do sit up and take notice if you ring them up, and I would never underestimate the importance of an MP in at least making the civil servants come to a decision. I don't say you can get them to make the decision you want, but at least you can make them speed up and come to that decision.

There is a spectrum of objectives of such ventures, ranging from emergency action to save a firm about to cease operations in the area, to efforts actually to keep industries from coming into areas either because they are regarded as already having the proper mix of economic activity or because of environmental reasons. Some lobbying thus involves objectives appropriate to the 'downside' of the industrial cycle and some to the 'upside'. The range of objectives cited in the interviews (with number of respondents citing each objective in parentheses) include the following.

1. Preventing pending closure and saving threatened jobs (19).
2. Promoting public infrastructure spending (roads, port facilities, airports) (25).
3. Gaining treatment favourable to firms in a variety of categories, including:
 - tax relief (8)
 - help with international trading problems (31)
 - relaxation of regulations, including European Community regulations (13)
 - obtaining defence contracts (7).
4. Bringing new industry into the area (gaining assisted area, enterprise zone, or free port, status; promoting industrial estates with local rate relief, obtaining loan guarantees for small businesses) (33).
5. Protecting the local environment against existing industry or preventing locally undesirable industry from coming into the area (18).

Note that the most frequently cited objective is bringing new industry into the area. This often involves activity that is not directed at the central government so much as local authorities, development groups and firms themselves. Nineteen of the 33 MPs who seek to bring industry into their areas are classified as constituency lobbyists. For the remaining 14, the focus of attention is essentially local. They do not report having persistently sought support at the national level of government.

The finding that about half of the Conservative MPs engage in constituency lobbying does not accord well with the prevailing view in the literature. It also appears to be at odds with Searing's findings, since he placed only about four per cent of his sample of MPs in his 'local promoter' category, and at most only 12 per cent treated this rôle as central to their job descriptions. He did find a higher incidence of Conservatives fitting the local promoter rôle than Labour MPs (9 against 4), while Labour MPs were more apt than Conservatives (37 against 25) to fall into the 'welfare officer' category.³⁴ The latter accords with his earlier reported findings that Labour Members were more strongly attached to a 'representation set' of beliefs about the MP's rôle, than a 'deliberative set', to which the Conservatives were more attached.³⁵ The deliberative set is more compatible with the Burkean image of MPs deliberating in a national setting about national problems, rather than seeing themselves as primarily constituency representatives responsible to the electorate for expressing its wishes and serving its needs.

It seems unlikely that the gap between the 4–12 per cent of Labour and Conservative MPs whom Searing classified as local promoters and the 50 per cent of Conservatives reported here as constituency lobbyists can be resolved by definitional differences alone. It is likely that the ten-year interval between the two sets of interviews is significant. This follows the reasoning that Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina offer for constituency service of the more individualized (or welfare officer) kind. MPs are engaging in more constituency-orientated activity today because the constituencies are less secure than they once were; but this insecurity is of an economic as well as a political nature.

A mixture of political and economic factors in the motivation behind constituency economic interest lobbying by MPs seems plausible if one reasons that the constituency, while in the first instance an electoral unit, is also part of an economic unit, the 'travel-to-work area'. The vote for the incumbent MP who is a member of the party in power will in part be dependent upon the economic fortunes of the area in which his or her constituency is found. How many votes can be lost as a result of a poor economic record locally and how many can be won by a good local economic performance cannot be assessed, but, if the set is vulnerable in electoral terms, the imponderable nature of this economic factor can itself move the MP to give it considerable weight in calculating re-election strategy. At the very least, it may be deemed useful to 'be seen' to be active in attempting to forestall or redress local economic misfortunes. The local economic condition can be regarded as a factor that interacts with electoral marginality, but it is analytically separable. A constituency could be marginal

³⁴ Searing, 'The rôle of the good constituency member', p. 355.

³⁵ D. D. Searing, 'Rules of the game in Britain: can politicians be trusted?' *American Political Science Review*, 76 (1982), p. 247.

for reasons that are not associated with the present state of the local economy, yet the 'winnability' of the seat could be further reduced by adverse economic developments. Or a strong economic performance could edge a constituency out of the marginal category into the semi-safe domain. The concept of vulnerability employed here does not, it should be emphasized, proceed from the assumption that the local economy is perceived by the MP as a good in itself, leading to energetic activity on its behalf independently of the possible electoral benefits to be derived from activity. An altruistic interpretation such as this would be more compatible with the 'ideological hypothesis' discussed below.³⁶

This explanation may be tested by offering it as one of two competing hypotheses to be assessed by the interview data. If constituency political/economic vulnerability accounts for constituency lobbying, then it should be a better predictor of the phenomenon than the reasonable alternative, that constituency lobbying accords with ideological predisposition; that those who lobby are ideologically predisposed to constituency lobbying, while those who do not are predisposed in the opposite fashion.

Searing has found not only that Labour MPs are more orientated towards the representational function than Conservative ones, but also that the incidence of such orientations rises in both parties as one moves from right to left on the spectrum.³⁷ This suggests the hypothesis that Conservative moderates, or 'wets', are still today more friendly to the representative rôle and thus more likely to be constituency lobbyists than are the right-wing 'drys'. The appropriate line of reasoning is that Conservative MPs who are friendly to government intervention in the economy ('wets') will have no inhibitions about constituency economic lobbying, while neo-liberal opponents of such intervention (drys) will regard such activity by MPs as both illegitimate and counter-productive to government efforts to reduce its involvement in the economy. Opposed to this is the 'vulnerability hypothesis', which is based on the premise that MPs whose constituencies are economically and thus politically vulnerable will see lobbying as a way of attempting to reduce both kinds of vulnerability, especially the political kind. MPs from economically and politically safe constituencies will feel no such 'territorial imperative'.

The Ideological Hypothesis

Respondents were asked: 'In the face of the current economic crisis, should the British government withdraw as much as possible from the economy, or should it be active in attempting to adapt the economy to the crisis?' Answers tending in the direction of less government intervention were classified as 'dry' and those envisaging more intervention were labelled 'wet'. Table 1 depicts the relationship between this 'rôle of government' question and the dichotomy 'lobbyist/non-lobbyist'. Clearly, on this basic statement of abstract principle, the dry side of the party is predominant: 33 dry responses were registered, as opposed to 15 wet responses, and 22 classified as in between. Over half of the

³⁶ Howard Margolis, *Selfishness, Altruism, and Rationality: A Theory for Social Choice* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³⁷ Searing, 'Rules of the game in Britain', p. 249.

TABLE 1. Cross-tabulation: Government Intervention by Constituency Lobbying.

	Lobbyists	Non-lobbyists	Total
Wet	7	8	15
Intermediate	11	11	22
Dry	18	15	33
Total	36	34	70

Note: $r = -0.06$; significance = 0.60.

drys are classified as lobbyists, while slightly more than half of the wets are in the non-lobbying category. The small negative correlation is not significant. At the level of basic principle, the relationship, wet = lobbyist, dry = non-lobbyist, is not supported.

The dry response to the general question has a certain knee-jerk quality to it, however. Respondents were pushed further with questions asking how they would get the British economy back on track. The phenomenon of unemployment was brought forth, if it had not already been broached by the respondent, and the question was posed as to whether measures should be taken to help out industries and firms beset by high levels of job losses. Over twice as many MPs (68.5 per cent) answered this question negatively as answered it positively. As anticipated, drys (on the general question) were nearly 4 to 1 against aid to declining industries, while wets were in favour, but by only a 3 to 2 margin. Of the 26 MPs who responded in dry fashion to both the general and the more specific questions, 15 are lobbyists, 11 are non-lobbyists. Of the 9 'consistent wets', 6 are lobbyists and 3 are not. Thus, adding the new element to the wet-dry dimension improves our ability to predict 'wet lobbying', but not 'dry lobbying'. When constituency lobbying is regressed on government intervention and declining industry, the r^2 produced is only 0.06. This does not represent much support for the ideological hypothesis.

The Vulnerability Hypothesis

The vulnerability hypothesis rests on the assumption that constituency lobbying requires certain political and economic constituency characteristics to make it a worthwhile rôle for MPs to assume. Table 2 displays results of some tests of the hypothesis. The premise is that constituency lobbying is motivated by the desire for re-election. Taking a winning percentage of less than 45 per cent in 1983 to indicate a marginal seat,³⁸ 12 of the 17 MPs in such seats responded as active lobbyists. However, it is less apparent that MPs from ultra-safe seats ignore the lobbying function. Ten from constituencies with votes of 55 per cent or more in 1983 were active lobbyists, against 12 who were not. The coefficient for the

³⁸ This measure of marginality is used because of the fact that most incumbent Conservatives now face a three-cornered constituency battle. Frequently the more serious challenge will come from the Alliance candidate. Thus, the margin between the Conservative and Labour percentages in the 1983 elections is no longer as relevant as the strength of Conservative support versus that of both challengers.

TABLE 2. Cross-tabulations: Security Hypothesis Variables by Constituency Lobbying.

Variable		Lobbyists	Non-lobbyists	Total	<i>r</i>	Significance
Seat marginality	<45%	12	5	17	-0.22	0.06
	45-55%	14	17	31		
	>55%	10	12	22		
	Total	36	34	70		
Region	Periphery*	13	7	20	0.28	0.02
	Midlands	9	4	13		
	South*	14	23	37		
	Total	36	34	70		
Manufacturing % of workforce	>40%	12	7	19	0.24	0.05
	30-40%	14	16	30		
	<30%	10	11	21		
	Total	36	34	70		
Unemployment	>9%	14	8	22	0.19	0.12
	7-9%	11	9	20		
	<7%	11	17	28		
	Total	36	34	70		
Constituency type (subjective)	Mfg	30	18	48	0.33	0.006
	Non-mfg	6	16	22		
	Total	36	34	70		
Constituency economy (subjective)	Weak	14	5	19	-0.26	0.03
	Medium	12	14	26		
	Strong	10	15	25		
	Total	36	34	70		

Source: Seat marginality data from *The Times Guide to the House of Commons* (1983); Manufacturing % of Workforce and Unemployment data from Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (1983).

* Regions assigned to Periphery: Scotland, Wales, NE England, NW England, Yorkshire and Humberside. Regions assigned to South: London, East Anglia, SE England, SW England.

correlation between seat marginality and constituency lobbying is not quite significant at the 0.05 level.

A quasi-political factor that might be advanced for explanation is the region of the country in which the constituency is located. 'Peripheral' regions of Britain have been sluggish in following the general trend of British voters away from the Labour Party and towards the Conservatives in the last two elections.³⁹ We would expect Conservatives from the peripheral areas to be more active in lobbying than those from the 'centre' (London, the south and the Midlands), not only because economic conditions are more severe, but also because of the greater pressure of political competition. This expectation holds up in part, since 65 per cent of the MPs from the north, Wales and Scotland are lobbyists and only 38 per cent from London and the south fall into that

³⁹ Curtice and Steed, 'Electoral choice and the production of government', p. 257.

category. Until recently the Midlands has been regarded as part of the southern 'centre', but unemployment had risen in the West Midlands more rapidly than in any region other than the north-west in the years immediately preceding the interviews.⁴⁰ When the East and West Midlands are made an intermediate category, a correlation of 0.28 is obtained, which is significant at the 0.05 level.

Two ways of accounting for MP lobbying in terms of constituency economic characteristics would be to look first at the economic *type* to which the constituency belongs and, secondly, at the economic *strength* of the constituency. Constituencies can be classified as primarily manufacturing, primarily service sector, primarily agricultural, or primarily residential. The manufacturing type is most likely to provide impetus for lobbying, since it contains a heavy concentration of jobs and has been the locus of the greatest increases in unemployment. If we use constituency type, taking 40 per cent or more to indicate an essentially manufacturing area, and less than 30 per cent to indicate an essentially non-manufacturing area (probably residential or agricultural), we find that 12 of the manufacturing constituencies are represented by lobbyists while 7 are not. At the other end of the scale there are 10 non-manufacturing constituencies with lobbying MPs and 11 without. The correlation coefficient of 0.24 is barely significant at the 0.05 level.

One difficulty with the 'percentage' of the workforce in manufacturing' as an indicator of constituency type is the 'travel-to-work' phenomenon. Is a residential area near the Ford plant at Dagenham in the eastern part of Greater London a manufacturing constituency or a residential one? What about constituencies that have a very diversified structure, indicating some manufacturing, some service industries, and even some agricultural employment? A *subjective* measure of constituency type was developed from MPs' discussions of constituency economic characteristics in the interviews. Sixty-three per cent of MPs who perceived their areas to be of the manufacturing type are lobbyists, as against only 27 per cent of those who see their constituencies as service sector, residential or agricultural. This test yielded the highest correlation coefficient in Table 2, significant at the 0.01 level.

In the case of economic strength, a standard objective measure is the percentage of the male population of working age in the constituency who are unemployed. Although the average male unemployment for Great Britain as a whole at the time of the last census (1981) was 10.5 per cent, in most Conservative-held constituencies it was less.⁴¹ Taking 'greater than 9 per cent male unemployment' as 'high', and 'less than 7 per cent' as 'low', for the constituencies represented by the Conservative respondents, MPs in 14 of the high-unemployment constituencies are lobbyists, against 8 MPs who are not. Eleven of the MPs in low-unemployment seats are lobbyists, compared with 18 who are not. Unemployment shows a weak and insignificant correlation with lobbying. It was frequently mentioned by MPs in both types of constituency, however, that the figures for unemployment are misleading, either because they hide true

⁴⁰ Alan R. Townsend, *The Impact of Recession: On Industry, Employment and the Regions, 1976-1981* (London, Croom Helm, 1983).

⁴¹ Great Britain, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *Census 1981: Parliamentary Constituency Monitors, 1983 Boundaries* (London, Government Statistical Services, 1983), p. 7 and *passim*.

figures that are significantly higher or because they overstate the totals of those who are really serious job seekers. Accordingly, the *subjective* assessment by the MP of the strength of the local economy was also measured. Of those who expressed negative or pessimistic views, 14 are lobbyists and 5 non-lobbyists, an improvement over the margins for high unemployment constituencies. Overall, the correlation coefficient for the subjective assessment of economic strength and constituency lobbying was significant at the 0.05 level.

Of course there is considerable interaction among these measures. The strongest network of intercorrelations is found between three variables: seat marginality, unemployment, and economic strength (subjective). The matrix of *r* coefficients among these three variables is as follows (levels of significance in parentheses):

	Seat marginality	Unemployment	Economic strength
Seat marginality	×	-0.50 (0.000)	0.40 (0.000)
Unemployment		×	-0.37 (0.002)
Economic strength (subjective)			×

Since these three variables intuitively come close to representing the concept of constituency security/vulnerability, they have been combined into a single measure by collapsing the two interval variables into a trichotomous variable, which is already the format for economic strength: +1.0, -1. The three were then added together to produce a 'security index' ranging from +3 to -3. In the case of unemployment, percentages greater than 9 were coded -1, while those less than 7 were coded +1; for seat marginality, >55 per cent = +1, <45 per cent = -1.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of constituency lobbying by security index. In general, as we proceed down the table toward the more secure constituencies, the percentage of lobbyists is reduced. But it is not a smooth transition, although the *r* coefficient of correlation is -0.35, significant at the 0.01 level. The principal 'outliers' are found in the upper right and lower left regions of the table. Of the four non-lobbying MPs in the relatively vulnerable constituencies with scores of -2, three were among the June 1983 intake. All three gave the distinct impression that they were fighting the idea of themselves as constituency lobbyists, but recognized that circumstances might demand it of them if they wanted to be re-elected. At least one of these has probably already assumed the rôle. The other two will continue resisting it at their peril, because local economic circumstances are particularly unfavourable (13 per cent and 15 per cent unemployment).⁴² The fourth MP, although well into his fifties, had

⁴² One of these fought the notion of constituency lobbying very hard: 'I think, if I may say so, it is my understanding that an American Congressman would feel his rôle much more in this field, because the United States is such a huge country, and indeed a continent. I don't see myself here at Westminster as a promoter of [my town], though that must of course be a part of what I do. I am here to play my part in the government of this country, and that may sometimes mean that I may have to be prepared to support, in the interest of the UK as a whole, policies that may not help my constituency and indeed might just injure it. And I tell you here and now that most Members of

TABLE 3. Cross-tabulation: Security Index by Constituency Lobbying.

Index	Lobbyist	Non-lobbyist	Total
-3	5	0	5
-2	4	4	8
-1	8	6	14
0	8	4	12
+1	4	6	10
+2	3	8	11
+3	4	6	10
Total	36	34	70

Note: $r = 0.35$; significance = 0.003.

served only one term. He had entered the House of Commons in the service of his political principles and said that he would not be drawn into compromising those principles by local industrialists seeking favours. He later acknowledged that this was not necessarily a formula for political longevity, but said that, at his age, he had no great political ambitions. He could understand why the younger MPs might be actively seeking to shore up their constituency bases, although he did not approve of their behaviour. He was the most nearly a true Burkean found among the Conservatives.

The seven constituency lobbyists in the two cells at the bottom left of Table 3 are among those who appeared to be the most ambitious and, with the exception of one publicly recognized maverick, the best connected in higher party circles. Most of them take the rôle of constituency lobbying for granted, indicating in considerable detail that they do not passively wait for overtures to be made to them, but seek out ways in which they can be of service to their affluent constituencies. Three of them represent areas along the 'high tech M4 corridor' west of London. Two others are from areas just beyond suburban London and Manchester which have high percentages of executive/managerial residents. The remaining two are from more remote areas with physically pleasant environments, attractive to newer, smaller firms moving into the regions. In all of these cases the MPs are infrequently engaged in trying to save jobs, and only four of the seven are really attempting to supplement the rôle of

Parliament certainly see "my rôle as the United Kingdom first". And we're such a small country that our rôle in promoting the area we represent is not quite so pre-eminent as I would tend to believe many American Congressmen would tend to see their rôle.' But the Burkean first prize later eluded him, although just barely: Q. 'I've found all kinds of combinations and relatively few take a stand as strong as you have. There have been some who have, and it suggests consistency of principles.' A. 'Maybe they haven't taken as strong a stand as I have because they've been here a bit longer and have, you know, smoothed over their opinions in certain things. But I think the other thing is they're always looking to their constituency, and you know that today your ability to serve your area is much more closely monitored than used to be the case 30 years ago, and therefore you are under the necessity to be seen to promote your constituency in a way that Members of Parliament 30 or 40 years ago would never have dreamed of . . . My predecessor, by the way . . . served for 30 years as the constituency representative, and he took very much the national view and left the locality to look after itself, which is again why I was nominated and elected, *because they felt they hadn't had enough local attention.*' (Emphasis added.)

local authorities and chambers of commerce in trying to attract industries into the area. But the common denominator appears to be an enthusiasm for the rôle, for the contacts it enables the MP to make, and for the sense of involvement in the successful side of British industry which it gives.⁴³

Who Lobbies? An Anomaly

The evidence presented above leads to a rejection of the hypothesis that constituency lobbying will not be found, and of the hypothesis that, if found, constituency lobbying will prevail among the wet, or interventionist side of the Conservative parliamentary party and not among the dry, or neo-liberal side. On the other hand, if not overstated, it seems that the hypothesis that constituency lobbying is a widespread phenomenon has been given strong enough support to establish the proposition that such lobbying is a normal part of the rôle definition of many Conservative MPs. There is also a statistically significant relationship between the security index and constituency lobbying, supporting the proposition that MPs from economically and politically vulnerable constituencies are more inclined than other MPs to engage in such lobbying. But the correlation coefficient is sufficiently low that other factors must account for a considerable portion of the variance. When we are confronted with a vulnerable constituency, we have some reason to expect the MP to behave as a constituency lobbyist, but when we turn to a secure constituency, we are at a loss to know why some MPs act as lobbyists and others do not. Something like this outcome of the analysis was predicted by one of the respondents, himself from a modestly vulnerable constituency, in a free-ranging conversation held at the conclusion of the interview:

I take the view that a Member sitting for a very marginal seat really works twice as hard or has to work twice as hard as somebody sitting in a safe seat. I'm not implying that all those Members who sit in safe seats don't work hard, but I am saying that those who sit in marginal seats have to and do, whereas some who sit in safe seats don't. I really occupy a Labour seat on borrowed time, and I'm always conscious of it.

In attempting to understand what motivates some MPs from relatively secure constituencies to engage in lobbying activities on behalf of local economic interests, it may be worth looking briefly at the ways in which constituency security and economic ideology interact. Table 4 displays the cross-tabulation of the security index and government intervention variables, showing the

⁴³ Although the following quotation from one of them does not convey the sense of satisfaction with the local economy that is found in other parts of his interview, it does convey his sense of being an insider, of having easy access. Q. 'Do you find yourself visiting with ministers from time to time on local projects?' A. 'Oh, yes. I mean, I think we have a perfect . . . nothing is perfect, but I like the way our system works. For example, at the moment we've got a major crisis in the pig industry in my part of the world and everywhere else for that matter; so that last week I just 'phoned up the minister's office and said I wanted to bring four people, not only pig producers but also the factory end of the thing, because both sides are under threat at the moment. All right you can have temporarily people going out of pig production, but if your factory closes down, then you've lost it for good. So that's our big worry. So within a week I've got an appointment to see the minister with these people, and I think that's very good. It's a nice easy, relaxed operation.'

TABLE 4. Cross-tabulation: Security Index by Government Intervention*.

	Wet	Intermediate	Dry	Total
Vulnerable	2 (1.0)	5 (1.0)	6 (0.33)	13 (0.69)
Intermediate	9 (0.56)	8 (0.25)	19 (0.68)	36 (0.56)
Secure	4 (0)	9 (0.44)	8 (0.38)	21 (0.33)
Total	15 (0.47)	22 (0.5)	33 (0.55)	70 (0.51)

* Percentage constituency lobbyists in parentheses.

percentages in each cell who are constituency lobbyists.⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that whereas none of the four wets from secure constituencies is a lobbyist, 41 per cent of intermediate and dry MPs from such constituencies are. More striking is the fact that whereas one-third of the dries from vulnerable constituencies are lobbyists, 49 per cent of dries from intermediate and secure constituencies lobby. These findings lend some credence to Samuel Beer's contention that populism has grown up on the right side of the Conservative party.⁴⁵

The 13 dry MPs from intermediate constituencies who are constituency lobbyists (68 per cent of the 19 in the cell) include several who are among the most consistent right-wing MPs interviewed. The fact that they are found in constituencies of mixed economic and political character may be coincidental. Such constituencies, however, are often areas which invite a high level of activity if MP's motivation is more to develop the local area economically than it is to protect his or her base politically, since that is relatively secure. There is some declining industry, but there are also growth opportunities.

The methodology employed does not enable one to ascertain to what extent such active MPs are essential or peripheral to the economic fortunes of their communities. Clearly the appropriate methodology would require a focus on the locality and the wide array of actors involved in the process of stimulating economic growth or resisting decline locally. Work along these lines appears to be well under way.⁴⁶ These studies tend to stress the rôle of local councils and business groups in attempting to devise developmental strategies for the locality, but make little or no mention of any rôle for MPs.⁴⁷ Perhaps the MPs were left out of the studies' purview because of the assumption that they are national figures, relatively inaccessible to local mobilization or else irrelevant to the process of locally generated economic self-help.⁴⁸ The present work has

⁴⁴ The multiple regression coefficient for the regression of constituency lobbying on government intervention and security index is $r^2 = 0.13$.

⁴⁵ S. H. Beer, *Britain against Itself: The Political Contradictions of Collectivism* (London, W. W. Norton, 1982), pp. 175-80.

⁴⁶ R. King (ed.), *Capital and Politics* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

⁴⁷ King, *Capital and Politics*, Chs 5 and 6.

⁴⁸ J. Bulpitt, *Territory and Power in the United Kingdom: An Introduction* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983), Ch. 5.

been in a grey area of British politics. Studies that take a national perspective have ignored the activity that has been taking place locally in Britain, especially as areas have found themselves falling by the wayside of economic change; while studies that have looked at the local activity have tended to see it in isolation from the national level, even trying to draw sharp conceptual distinctions between the two.⁴⁹

Conclusion

To the extent that the weight of the literature favours a Burkean interpretation of the rôle of Member of Parliament, that literature appears to need modification. The constituency he or she represents does play an important part in the life of the typical Member of Parliament. More than half the Conservative MPs interviewed are actively involved in serving generalized as well as individualized constituency interests and at least half take lobbying on behalf of these interests to be a normal part of their occupation. A judgement as to the efficacy of such lobbying efforts is beyond the scope of this research. MPs themselves varied widely in ascribing success or the lack of it to their lobbying activities. Numerous instances of successful efforts were cited, and fewer instances of failure; it was difficult to get most of the lobbyists to make general judgements about their influence on ministers. But the typical constituency lobbyist became more animated when the interview turned from general economic policy issues to constituency matters. The 'territorial imperative' has not as yet manifested itself to any great extent in the division lobbies, but the evidence that local industries are a preoccupation of numerous MPs, especially those representing areas where jobs are in jeopardy, is readily available from an examination of debates and of oral and written questions.⁵⁰ Perhaps its incidence has varied with the fortunes of British industry generally.

⁴⁹ King, *Capital and Politics*, pp. 19–20.

⁵⁰ Riddell, *The Thatcher Government*, p. 169.