The Heights of Modernity: the Labour Party and the politics of urban transformation, 1945-70

Submitted by Philip Child to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
In June 2016

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the politics of urban transformation in the immediate post-war period of British history, between 1945 and 1970. It centres on the Labour Party and considers the relationship of the party's socialist aims to modernity as a stimulus for radical urban policy, particularly in terms of housing. Whilst prior historical accounts of post-war urban change have tended to eschew ideology as a serious catalyst for the reconstruction of British cities, arguing instead that pragmatism and corruption were of greater consequence, this thesis contends that a modern, socialist utopian ideal was a defining feature of urban transformation undertaken by Labour at both a local and national level.

Archival material from Labour and the broader left of British politics, published sociological studies from the period 1945-70 and my own oral history interviews with key figures from the period lead this investigation. A thorough analysis of Labour's approach to key aspects of the urban environment enables this thesis to challenge existing understandings of post-war urban transformation as irrational or hard-headed. The thesis examines the relationship of Labour to the housing market, urban planning, understandings of community and the party's sense of history and modernity. It asserts that rent control, slum clearance and tower blocks were indicative of a modern, socialist urban vision for Labour, proposing that the 'modern moment' in twentieth-century British history be taken into greater consideration. As urban history acquires greater prominence in an age of increasing urbanisation, engagement with the rationale behind past urban transformation can make a significant contribution to the understanding of why particular urban policies become reality.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my first supervisor Andrew Thorpe, for his constant encouragement and interest in this project, and for supporting me throughout. To my original second supervisor, Andrew Thompson, I also owe thanks, particularly for his insight into the dynamic of race relations in post-war urban Britain. My current second supervisor, Marc Palen, has been both enthusiastic and supportive despite joining my supervisory team late on, and I thank him greatly for that.

I would also like to thank Jon Lawrence from my time at the University of Cambridge, for stimulating my interest in housing, and modern British history more generally. Similarly, I have benefited tremendously from conversations with my officemates, Fred Cooper and Simon Mackley. I owe the same debt to Ryan Davey, from whom I have gained insight into the concept of class from a social science bent.

In terms of the research, I am extremely grateful to all those who kindly consented to be interviewed and allowed me to use that material in this thesis. On archives, I must single out for praise Darren at the Labour History Archive in Manchester, for being an endless stream of useful knowledge and for pointing me towards hitherto obscure files.

Isabel Galleymore has been a constant source of support and a willing proof reader, and I cannot thank her enough for that. And I would finally like to acknowledge the support of my grandfather, without whom this project might have been more difficult.

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Introduction

Constructing the Past: The Labour Party and post-war urban history

In 1967, the Labour-controlled Greater London Council (GLC) produced a documentary film account of London's housing issues, along with the GLC's provision of new housing since its establishment in 1965.[1] As the film opened, new housing estates were contrasted with the worsening state of the rental market, and still existing slum housing. Shots of dilapidated terraces and tenements juxtaposed with shining low- and high-rise flats, as well as new semi-detached houses and bungalows. The film shifts to a dank, dark slum house with an outside toilet. One young mother expresses her frustration with the slow progress of local authority efforts to remove the slums: 'Of course the council say they're going to come down, they say they're slums, but they've been coming down since I was four!'[2] Her disappointment illustrates both the difficulties posed by 'all-out' slum clearance and, on another level, the desire for a 'modern' tomorrow in the late 1960s. The film's further juxtapositions of old and new housing are a reminder that comprehending the immense changes to the urban environment requires a mental picture of the world that was.

The GLC film provides a useful reminder of the state-led 'mission' of creating a modern, urban Britain, as well as the reality of dreadful slum housing still in existence circa 1967. Far from the common depiction of a seamless shift from the shivering slums amidst post-war austerity, to the union-jack bedecked semi-detached affluence, followed by soaring tower blocks against a pop soundtrack, the period 1945-70 was one of both intense and incomplete urban development. Whilst London's experience of post-1945 urban development may have differed from other British cities in some respects, all could be characterised by a desire to radically reshape the urban environment in a modern form, and to do away with an unwanted built past.

Crucially, the picture represented in the GLC film also challenges the historian to embrace the cultural, political and social complexity of the change in

[1] The GLC was the overarching local government body for planning and coordinating housing provision within London, though individual London boroughs also had their own plans. It was initially controlled by the Labour Party, before being displaced by the Conservatives in the 1967 local elections.

[2] London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), Greater London Council, *Somewhere Decent to Live* (1967), accessed online 6 February 2016 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A2wa9yeAKk.

Britain's built environment over the period. Moreover, the legacy of this drive to 'modernity' remains contested – both in terms of what was removed through slum clearance and 'comprehensive redevelopment' programmes and the modern housing estates built as replacements. Indeed, in the GLC film, tenants of exceptionally modern flat blocks captured this nuance, variously describing their high-rise homes as 'jolly ugly' and '…when you come up here, you feel like you're a princess!'[3] Further to this, the *intentions* of those involved in the creation of housing and new urban spaces are generally overlooked. Writing on the subject has not evaded the 'politics of housing', but until relatively recently, histories of the urban have tended to see the advance of the post-war modern city as a question of pragmatism over ideology.[4] If this focus is taken as an imbalance, regarding the reasoning behind the practical implementation of 'modernity' with greater seriousness may enable greater clarity in assessing the outcome of this thinking. As the narrator of the GLC film went on to announce: 'So there's the problem – and what a problem!'[5]

This thesis addresses the rationale for post-war urban transformation, considering *why* and *how* the Labour Party utilised a conception of modernity to drive forward ambitious plans for British cities. Concentrating on the thinking, deliberations and actions of Labour – in government from 1945-51, and again in 1964-70, as well as largely dominant in the local government of most major British cities – allows for a focused study of the reasoning by which the modern reshaping of the urban environment took place. With some justification, Labour has been perceived as the primary agent of the kinds of modern, urban alterations that occurred in the post-war era, in part due to the high levels of public housing created.[6] Labour-led councils in Birmingham, London, Manchester and Glasgow, amongst others, were responsible for some of the most iconic (and infamous) monuments to the modern moment.[7] Whilst this is not to deny the Conservative involvement in the process – though it is the case

[3] LMA, GLC, *Somewhere Decent to Live* (1967).
[4] Probably the most influential text in this regard is: Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-75: A Study of Corporate Power and Professional Influence in the Welfare State* (Oxford, 1981). A more recent example is: Peter Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester, 2007)
[5] LMA, GLC, *Somewhere Decent to Live* (1967).
[6] *BBC News* (14 April 2015), accessed online 6 February 2016 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14380936.
[7] For a comprehensive survey of major local authority projects, see Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven, 1994).

that Conservative involvement in modernism has been largely obscured historiographically – it can be (freely) said that Labour adherents tended to be greater enthusiasts for modern schemes.[8]

Historiographical explorations of Labour's practice of modernism, however, have tended to confine themselves to the architectural, without interrogating *what* Labour believed modernity to be. This could be symptomatic of the myriad ways in which historians have written about post-war housing and urban development more generally. For example, discussions of public housing have often been self-contained or linked to the broader welfare state, whilst a number of histories of slum areas have concentrated on questions of class identity or gender experience.[9] The absence of studies drawing together the political ideology and utopian fantasy (albeit one which was at least partially enacted) that drove urban modernity is notable. Without an understanding of the reasoning by which Labour, as key actors in the urban transformation of British cities, came to their direction of travel and what it meant for their socialism, the tenets of modernism – and more importantly, the physical representations of this philosophy that still remain in Britain – may all too easily be dismissed as idle fantasy.

Housing has become one of the most fraught topics in contemporary British life. In 2012-13, house-building hit a post-war low of 135,500 homes built, and a combination of increasing house prices and steeply rising private rents began to create a sense of a national 'housing crisis.'[10] All major political parties went into the 2015 general election promising an increase in house-building and various measures for dealing with the housing crisis – perhaps most starkly with the Conservative leader and Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement of a manifesto pledge to extend the 'right to buy' policy for sitting

[8] Important exceptions are: Peter Mandler, 'New towns for old', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds.), *Moments of modernity: reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (London, 1999), 208-27; and Otto Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain, 1959-1966', *The Historical Journal*, 58:1 (2015), 217-244.
[9] An example of 'welfare state history' would be: Peter Malpass, 'The Wobbly Pillar? Housing and the British Postwar Welfare State', *Journal of Social Policy*, 32:4 (2003), 589-606. Of class identity: Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, 22:4, 501-518; and of gender experience: Stephen Brooke, ''Slumming in Swinging London?' Class, Gender and the Post-War City in Nell Dunn's *Up The Junction* (1963)', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:3, (2012) 429–449.
[10] *BBC News* (13 January 2015) accessed online 6 February 2016 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30776306.

tenants to buy socially rented homes to housing association tenants.[11] The subsequent election victory of the Conservatives and the controversy that this policy has unleashed has revealed deep cultural concerns in Britain over the contested legacy of post-war housing. Not least in that the major urban transformations of the post-war era have been seized upon as a case of either effective or ineffective housing policy, depending on the political persuasion. The latter point was underscored by the announcement in January 2016 by Cameron that one hundred 'sink housing estates, many built after the war' (public or housing association) would be demolished in order to help people 'trapped in poverty.'[12] Though not all details have been announced at the time of writing, those estates that were mentioned such as the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham and the Lower Falinge estate in Rochdale were near-uniformly modernist in character.[13] The extreme poverty that exists on these estates is all too real. But, the discussion of 'brutal high rises' by Cameron could be seen to have represented an apex of an ongoing political, social and cultural debate about the significance of the modern, urban transformation of British cities after the Second World War. To some extent, this has taken place as a dispute on the merits of different styles of architecture. But there is more to it than meets the eye.

As this thesis will go on to explore, throughout the process of urban change in the immediate post-war period there remained a dissenting perception that modern buildings were *inherently* worse, in both physical and psychological terms, than the older constructs that they replaced. This thesis argues that this perception achieved a certain dominance as enthusiasm for the modern project waned, and a broad reappraisal of Victorian architecture in particular took place from the mid-1970s onwards. This systematically negative reading of modernism has passed into popular culture, particularly in the case of the high-rise tower block, which has become a dystopian archetype in film,

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[11] *Daily Telegraph* (13 April 2015) accessed online 6 February 2016 at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/11533924/David-Cameron-revives-right-to-buy-and-says-Tories-are-the-party-of-working-people.html. Ironically, housing associations increased in importance in the late 1980s as a consequence of the original 'right to buy' policy (part of the Housing Act 1980), as councils recognised that homes couldn't be sold to tenants if part of housing associations, duly transferring public housing stock to them.

[12] *BBC News* (10 January 2016) accessed online 6 February 2016 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35274783.

[13] *The Guardian* (10 January 2016) accessed online 6 February 2016 at http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/09/david-cameron-vows-to-blitz-poverty-by-demolishing-uks-worst-sink-estates.

television and literature.[14] The development of social problems on some housing estates has combined with popular influences to create a wide-ranging cultural narrative that modern housing is for the most part aesthetically displeasing and socially undesirable. Writing on the subject of 1950s slum clearance in a 2006 volume, for example, Peter Hennessy encapsulated this rather unsympathetic perspective, remarking that most of the public housing built at this time '…fifty years later, lacks a single defender.'[15]

Whilst Hennessy's attitude is by no means uncommon, an assertive counter-narrative has begun to form. The broadcaster and architectural writer Jonathan Meades was an early figure to reaffirm the value of modern housing, arguing of high-rise housing in one 1994 documentary that '…the ineptitude of so many of the system built blocks of those years [the sixties] somehow engendered the idea that it was *height itself* that was to blame.'[16] Writers such as Owen Hatherley, John Grindrod and Lynsey Hanley have been joined by the geographer Danny Dorling in the nostalgia-tinged contention that whilst modern housing and post-war redevelopment was not always effective, it nevertheless had great merit and indeed is exactly what the present urban experience is lacking.[17]

These duelling narratives present a historical obstacle, not least in that both are informed by a partially imagined past. The dominant perception – that the urban transformation of post-war Britain was a misguided if not malicious

[14] There are numerous examples of this, but most notably: the film *Harry Brown* (2009), set on an ultra-violent London housing estate; episodes of the popular BBC police drama *The Bill* (1984-2010) made conspicuously heavy use of modern housing estates, including the flatblocks of the High Path estate in South Wimbledon; and the novel *High Rise* (1975) by J.G. Ballard describes a dystopian tower block where, in an inversion of the usual theme, the opulence of the aesthetic surroundings cause the inhabitants to descend into a near-feral state. The latter was adapted to film in 2015, with considerable media discussion of the aesthetics of high-rise blocks accompanying the film's release.

[15] Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London, 2006), 493. Similar sentiments are contained within the other key popular histories of the period, especially Dominic Sandbrook's work: *Never Had It So Good: a History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2006); *White Heat: a History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2006). David Kynaston is more balanced, but still rather pessimistic: *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (London, 2007); *Family Britain, 1951-57* (London, 2010); *Modernity Britain: opening the box 1957-59* (London, 2013); *Modernity Britain: a shake of the dice 1959-62* (London, 2015).

[16] BBC, *Further Abroad: Get High* (1994).

[17] Christopher Beanland, *Concrete Concept: Brutalist Buildings Around the World* (London, 2016); Danny Dorling, *All that is Solid: The Great Housing Disaster* (London, 2014); John Grindrod, *Concretopia* (London, 2014); Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London, 2007); Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism* (London, 2009); *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London, 2010); *A New Kind of Bleak: Journeys Through Urban Britain* (London, 2012). It should be noted that whilst all are relatively partisan, Dorling and Hanley are more willing to accept that some of the public moved away from modern architecture, and some may never have liked it.

imposition of cruel slab blocks and other travesties on a captive population – assiduously overlooks both the parlous state of British cities in the period as well as the fact that new housing and redevelopment were supported by a large proportion of the citizenry, at least at first. Likewise, the opposing judgement – that, as Dorling puts it, the modernist output was expressive of the collective action of the period, but 'we so quickly forget those far more equitable times, as some of us return to older, outdated moralities' – is too sanguine a reading of the period.[18] In this regard, there is a danger of history slipping into polemic should the historian not be critically engaged with these opposing viewpoints. Moreover, as has been suggested, the focus on architecture may obscure the reasoning of those involved in the modern moment – for Labour actors, there is a strong case that it was not always the precise architecture that mattered in urban transformation, but the *spirit* of modern, radical change.

In light of this debate, it would seem an auspicious moment to delve into the post-war 'politics of housing' – the last great phase of far-ranging urban transformation. The discordant nature of the discussion on what the urban transformation of Britain in the post-war period was, as well as how and why it occurred, indicate that a closer investigation of the motives and objectives of those involved in the political process of transformation is required.

Four key research questions will be at the centre of this investigation. Firstly, how did those within Labour understand 'modernity' and its relationship to the notion of 'progress' – and what did this mean for housing and the urban environment? As a survey of existing literature will go on to discuss, in the majority of scholarship to date modernity has appeared an opaque concept, without a precise meaning beyond that of architecture. Despite clearly being associated with 'progress' – a broader term encapsulating both a physical and moral move to enlightenment with several distinct forms from the late nineteenth century onwards – modernity has received comparatively less scholarly attention. As an important means by which the Labour Party understood societal change in the twentieth century, determining what Labour believed the modern to signify and how this was applied to the urban environment is of considerable importance to comprehending the party psychology in the period.

Secondly, why did slum clearance and urban redevelopment often result in 'modern' forms of housing – and why is the legacy of this sort of housing in

[18] Dorling, *All that is Solid*, 154.

particular so contested? Whilst pragmatic judgement and even the whims of architects have been focused upon in previous answers to the first part of this question, shrewd decision-making and professional callousness are not exhaustive explanations of the modern moment. Indeed, as this introduction has discussed thus far, making sense of the second part of the research question – the conflicted comprehension of the contemporary built past – demands far greater sensitivity to the political aims of modernists.

Thirdly, how did Labour actors understand 'modern life', in terms of housing and the urban environment? Many Labour members believed that their vision of the urban future would deliver a radically better way of life. The fact that this vision manifestly did not come to pass in the manner that Labour intended has stymied analyses of the world that they were attempting to bring into being. Though party members undoubtedly held strong suspicions of material affluence, this did not negate a desire for the technological advances of the period to benefit those that Labour represented.

Fourthly, why did Labour actors regard quality housing as a solution to urban deprivation – and why did urban poverty remain resilient throughout the post-war era? It was not without reason that Ken Coates and Richard Silburn's 1970 study into post-war deprivation *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* centred on the slum dwellings of St Ann's in Nottingham.[19] Though the importance of adequate shelter might appear self-evident, the post-war era saw a decline in *absolute* poverty and a continuation of *relative* poverty. Simply put, absolute poverty refers to deprivation of basic needs below a minimum standard. Conversely, relative poverty refers to a standard of poverty defined according to the society in which the individual lives, which can rise or fall. Good housing could assist with solving the former, but the story of relative poverty is one of increasing complexity as the post-war years went on. It is therefore an intricate question as to why Labour members continued with near-certainty to view good housing as a means of solving deprivation, and the answer may lie in the manner in which Labour collectively discerned housing as a part of the welfare system. Equally, the inadequacies of this mentality for engaging with less visible issues of deprivation may help to explain why urban

[19] Ken Coates and Richard Silburn, *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* (Harmondsworth, 1976) 1st published 1970.

poverty continued to be a feature of the post-war landscape, despite the best intentions of those within Labour.

The resolution of these questions throughout this thesis will challenge the often contradictory popular narratives of post-war urban transformation, as well as clarify and expand upon the role of Labour in building post-war Britain. In his influential study of post-war high-rise housing, Patrick Dunleavy suggested that he wanted to explain the disjunction between 'ideals and reality', but leaned to the latter without entirely accounting for the former – and as the literature review will argue, a large number of subsequent histories of the urban have followed suit.[20] This thesis explores the formation of urban Britain with due regard for the conceptions, dreams and desires which made it possible.

Modernity and Socialism

Two powerful ideas will serve as a foundation for the arguments advanced. First, modernity – also 'modernism' or simply 'the modern' – will act as an explanatory device for the particular 'moment' in mid-twentieth century history that this thesis explores. Second, socialism – or the distinct Labour variant of it – will be a means of understanding how Labour plans for the urban environment were believed to contribute to greater political aims. Modernity and socialism have had multiple meanings in different contexts, and whilst some measure of ambiguity is unavoidable, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by either term within the framework of this thesis.

The influential modernist thinker Marshall Berman asserted that whilst there were differing visions of modernity, all '…sprang from a largeness of vision and imagination, and from an ardent desire to seize the day.'[21] This universalising description aptly captures the modernist need to radically alter the environment within which its proponents existed. But what was modernity, exactly? Modernity, modernism and the modern have been utilised almost interchangeably to refer to a state of ceaseless movement, of revolutionary adaption to a shifting present. In addition, it is important to distinguish at this point between the relatively self-contained *architectural* modernism, which

[20] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, 2-3.
[21] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1983) 1st published 1982, 33.

though without question fitting into the broader circumstances of modernity, had stricter delineations and clearer expressions within the architectural field.[22]

As Berman himself recognised, there have been several instances of modernity, to the extent that it is possible to take a long view of modernity dating back to 1500 (as Berman did).[23] But Berman was clear that his experiences of living in a 'modern building' in the Bronx area of New York City substantially informed his understanding of modernity, as did witnessing the urban transformation of the Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s.[24] It is this post-war 'modern moment' that this thesis will be concerned with, although it is important to recognise the influence of past phases of modernity. Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger claimed that the form of 'modernity' that they dated as existing from 1870 to 1940 was first and foremost a means of 'locating the present' – a present which, as they acknowledged, varied considerably over their eighty-year period.[25] In his investigation into understandings of modernity by early British socialists, Thomas Linehan asserted that the Edwardian period was *the* 'utopian-modernist "moment", whereby the future was perceived by many socialists as an exciting realm of possibility.'[26] Linehan's reading of 'socialist modernism' was one of paradoxical progressivism – the 'utopian socialists' of his reading believed that through harking back to the mythical classlessness of pre-industrial 'Merrie England', they could bring into existence a *new* form of this.[27]

Whilst the circumstances for Labour post-1945 were somewhat different to that of their dreaming antecedents pre-1914, as the French philosopher Bruno Latour has observed, in spite of a multiplicity of definitions of 'modern', 'all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time.'[28] Both instances of modernity sought to explain the shifting present and hasten the advent of the future. In his provocatively titled work *We have never been modern*, Latour drew similarities between the understanding of modernity and

[22] Architectural modernism generally followed the innovative work of Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus School, as well as the work of Le Corbusier, with numerous sub-fields.
[23] Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 16.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, 'Introduction', Martin Daunton and Bernard Rieger, (eds.) *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford, 2001), 1-24 at 5.
[26] Thomas Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism* (Basingstoke, 2012), 49.
[27] Ibid., 57.
[28] Bruno Latour (translated by Catherine Porter), *We have never been modern* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 15.

the historical revisionism of the French Revolution that had been led by François Furet from the 1960s onwards. Latour argued that Furet's view that 'the actors and chroniclers of 1789 used the notion of revolution to understand what was happening to them, and to influence their own fate' was analogous to the heralds of modernity being aware of the *potential* to irreversibly break with the past, but rarely doing so.[29] He went on to assert that modernity was believed to have been 'arrived at' by its practitioners via 'a veritable bulldozer operation behind which the past disappeared forever' – perhaps an allusion to slum clearance as the most visible form of this disappearance – dividing the past into a 'barbarian medley' against the 'civilising distinction' of the future.[30] Crucially, then, in Latour's reading modernity was a *belief* that the past could be removed in favour of a better future, and a description of the *process* by which this could occur. In a similar vein, Raphael Samuel described the essence of modernity as a struggle against the past, but noted that even when the 'past' appeared to have won with the rise of the conservationist movement in Britain from the late 1970s, it was in fact a complex fusion of past habits and modern sensibilities.[31] Both Latour and Samuel's interpretations of modernity find their fullest expressions in the changing urban environment. Returning to Berman, the crux of his argument centred on his contention that in the post-war 'moment', the 'modern spirit' produced an urban environment at odds with the civilising grandeur of this spirit. For Berman, the origins of the 'dreadful and intractable modern wastelands' of 1960s New York City, symbolised by the highways planned by Robert Moses were to be found in the 'luminous visions of the 1930s.'[32]

For the purposes of this thesis, modernity will refer to the post-war belief of socialists that 'everything that [did] not march in step with progress [was] archaic, irrational or conservative.'[33] Following Latour, modernity will be recognised as fracturing due to the fact that time did not flow progressively in

[29] Ibid., 37-42.
[30] Ibid., 102.
[31] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), 70.
[32] Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 304-310. Robert Moses, the city planner of New York City from 1922 to 1968 was an archetypal technocrat, responsible for the colossal urban transformation of the city. Moreover, an influential biography by Robert Caro, *The Power Broker* (1974) has reinforced the impression that Moses' projects were primarily about the consolidation of personal power.
[33] Latour, *We have never been modern*, 60.

this sense, but rather a 'turbulent flow of whirlpools and rapids.'[34] In the urban, post-war context, modernity was in the socialist imagination both a potentiality and a procedure. This thesis will outline the attempts to bring the urban modern into reality in twentieth century Britain.

In contrast to modernity, socialism has had a number of relatively well-defined meanings, but the variety practised by the Labour Party has frustrated simple explanations. Socialism could mean more than one thing for Labour members, and was, as Henry Drucker claimed, not a fixed doctrine.[35] This had important consequences for Labour's approach to the urban environment, with much of party debate on housing and urban policy focusing on whether what was proposed was appropriate for a socialist party.

Labour's own difficulties of defining a 'socialist party' were manifest. Martin Francis has rightly observed that Labour's socialism was 'not a methodical guide to action along the lines of Marxism-Leninism.'[36] Critiquing calls from the Labour left to go back to 'socialist first principles', Anthony Crosland pointed out in *The Future of Socialism* in 1956 that 'nothing is more traditional in the history of socialist thought than the violent rejection of past doctrines.'[37] Crosland's point was that socialism, especially the Labour variety, was capable of adaption and evolution. It had originated as both a challenge to economic exploitation and as a moral purpose, and as Jeremy Nuttall has described, neither position was solely the preserve of the party left or right. He observed that the 1950s saw the roles of the Labour left and right reversed from their 1930s thinking – with the former becoming more concerned with ethics and the latter the use of power.[38] Indeed, Ross McKibbin has demonstrated that during the inter-war period, Labour had moved from an ingrained distrust of the state to the belief 'that "bigness" and centralized control were synonymous with efficiency, and that the state could manage bigness more efficiently.'[39]

Whilst not decrying the use of the state to enact socialism, Ralph Miliband famously made the case in his 1961 text *Parliamentary Socialism* that

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[34] Ibid., 60.
[35] H.M. Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party* (London, 1979), 18.
[36] Martin Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour, 1945-51: Building a new Britain* (Manchester, 1997), 5.
[37] C.A.R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism*, 3rd edition (London, 1956), 61.
[38] Jeremy Nuttall, *Psychological socialism: the Labour Party and qualities of mind and character, 1931 to the present* (Manchester, 2006), 70.
[39] Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010), 152.

Labour had diluted its radicalism in the cause of gaining parliamentary power.[40] For Miliband, there was no alternative form of socialism to a revolutionary Marxist one, but he noted that Labour's 'ambiguity of purpose' had been discussed since its inception as a political party.[41] The question of whether Labour should first seek to take control of the 'means of production', or to prioritise an egalitarian agenda of social justice, is a pertinent one, as the dominance of these outlooks at different times shaped Labour's socialism. Ben Jackson has made the case that the egalitarian agenda was pushed to the forefront during Hugh Gaitskell's period of Labour leadership from 1955-1963, as the 'revisionists' of Gaitskell's circle of friends and advisers believed that removing inequalities in British society would not be solved by further nationalisation.[42] Conversely, as Lawrence Black has argued, post-1951 the left that socialism was becoming less likely to occur as quickly as they had hoped, noting that '…the [economic and historical] forces that socialists imagined determined the course of politics, no longer seemed to presage socialism.'[43] However, if the socialist belief in radical change is considered alongside the modernist urge to bury an inadequate past, it is clear that in terms of housing and the urban environment, Labour actors had the ability to 'create' socialism. Labour dominance of major British cities throughout the post-war period, as well as two spells of national government, ensured that the party had plenty of opportunities to put a form of socialism into practice. Writing in the early 1960s, Crosland stated that there was a clear, socialist form of housing policy, which should '…reflect social decisions and not solely market valuations – if necessary, at some cost to economic growth.'[44]

Whilst Crosland's socialism was not always the socialism of all Labour members, there were discernible common characteristics to the socialist vision when applied to the urban environment.[45] Building council houses, demolishing

[40] Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary socialism: study in the politics of Labour*, 2nd edition (London, 1975) first published 1961, 274.
[41] Ibid., 16.
[42] Ben Jackson, *Equality and the British Left* (Manchester, 2007), 173.
[43] Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64: Old Labour, New Britain?* (Basingstoke, 2003), 15.
[44] C.A.R. Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy: A Programme of Radical Reform for the 1960s* (London, 1962), 195.
[45] It is important to note that Crosland was regarded with a degree of suspicion by the left and the older right, due to his 'revisionist' credentials (although he had achieved some sort of balance by the time of his death in 1977). However, *The Future of Socialism* was without question the most influential socialist text of the 1950s – provoking serious debate from all quarters.

the slums and reshaping British cities in a modern form were all viewed by Labourites as socialism in action. This belief was encapsulated by a 1954 pamphlet, in which the MP for Widnes James MacColl stated that 'the provision of good houses is as much a social service as the provision of good hospitals and schools.'[46] On this basis, this thesis will view socialism in Labour terms as first and foremost a case of ensuring all had decent homes regardless of income. Policies for housing and the urban environment, in spite of the multiplicity of priorities identified by Labour actors, therefore were consistently identified as a means of bringing socialism into being. Whilst socialism could appear a complex and uncertain concept, the provision of good homes and better cities was a relatively stable notion in the Labour belief structure.

Writing the Past: Labour, the urban environment and modernity

This thesis proposes that the Labour Party, housing and urban policy have been closely linked topics in the post-war period. Yet, this has not always been reflected in the existing historiography. Scholarship on the three topics has been closely demarcated – histories of housing have often been simply that, and although study of the Labour Party has long since expanded out of Westminster and Whitehall, the built environment has held far less allure than the whispers of town halls. Where this thesis aims to both expand upon and go beyond the existing literature is in the less well studied areas of what Labour thought about housing and the urban environment, and how this met wider conceptions of modernity and socialism.

A few works have combined elements of this case, or have shaped the field more broadly, and will be briefly addressed here. Dunleavy's 1981 work *The Politics of Mass Housing* focused on the perceived failings of high-rise housing as a form of state intervention into housing, suggesting that the process was guided less by ideology and more by central government instructions to utilise the high-rise form, as well as by corrupt councillors awarding building contracts to high-rise developers.[47] Dunleavy's assertions, formed primarily from interviews with former councillors, council officers and members of the

[46] Labour History Archive (hereafter LHA), LP/362.5/319, James MacColl, *Policy for Housing* (June 1954), 23.
[47] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, 118.

construction industry across Birmingham, Bristol and the London borough of Newham, have been an authoritative influence on the historiography of the post-war built environment.[48] However, Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius went on to challenge Dunleavy, suggesting that he was too easily convinced by the 'anti-flat' atmosphere of his time of writing, and too dismissive of the modern convictions of some of the actors involved in the process.[49] In their magisterial study of modern housing, *Tower Block*, Glendinning and Muthesius carried out a sweeping inquiry of construction, finance and policy on the ground, with interviews with several major city architects from the 1950s and 1960s.[50] They persuasively stated that local authority desires of grandeur and of building better cities were as much a factor in the spread of modern housing as pragmatism or corruption – this in their view being especially true of high-rise housing – but made little use of party politics as an avenue of investigation and did not critically interrogate modernity beyond an architectural standpoint.[51] Ross McKibbin has most significantly shaped Labour history, most recently his 2010 text *Parties and People: 1914-1951*.[52] Whilst McKibbin has largely worked outside the historical scope of this thesis – contributing major work on the inter-war period in particular – his argument that Labour has been a party defined more by adherence to tradition than radical change has led much scholarship on Labour.

This thesis challenges all three of these interpretations. Contra McKibbin, Labour did attempt to break with the past in its approach to the urban environment, with its sense of socialism a major influence in these efforts – even if they did not come to fruition. In a similar manner, Dunleavy's conviction that corruption and cynicism were the primary factors in the development of modern British cities is confronted. Whilst the significance of pragmatic judgements and lining one's own pockets in some circumstances will not be discounted, the research underpinning this thesis indicates that a drive to create a modern, socialist Britain was a sincere motivation for many within Labour. Equally, Glendinning and Muthesius' lack of concern for party politics, as well as

[48] And certainly the dominant influence on the scholarship for high-rise housing. It is also important to note that the ultra-loyal London Labour borough of Newham was formed in 1965, from West Ham and East Ham.
[49] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 325.
[50] Ibid., 4.
[51] Ibid., 4.
[52] McKibbin, *Parties and People*.

the meanings of modernity *beyond* architecture will be redressed throughout the chapters of this thesis.

The remainder of this section will examine the existing scholarship within which this thesis will operate, thematically arranged as: histories of the post-war Labour Party, particularly those focused on social policy; histories of post-war urban Britain and housing; and the more limited field of histories of modernity in Britain. This survey of the literature will consider how writing on these subjects has developed, and how it can inform the thesis.

Andrew Thorpe has remarked that Labour history has at points suffered from a tendency towards whiggishness, observing that 'the people who saw history as leading ineluctably towards the socialist millennium argued that Labour's progress had only been put on hold in 1951.'[53] Whilst much of the party's history has been written by people who were themselves activists, it is also worth noting that Thorpe was also drawing attention to a sense that Labour had generally 'failed' after 1951, whether in office or opposition.[54] Whether believers in the forward march of history or not, it is striking that most scholars have tended to assess the post-war history of Labour as a failure, or a series of missed opportunities. Kevin Morgan claimed that most readings of British history post-1945 '…have viewed it as a time of decline or eclipse, both external and internal.'[55] Jeremy Nuttall has characterised this gloomy critique as 'expecting too much socialism too early, and ignoring the complex bigger picture of evolutionary changes.'[56] These accounts have included those focused on Labour's time in government, in Westminster, in local government and party culture and identity more broadly. The focal points of this thesis – the urban environment and housing, as well as ideology – have had intermittent interest from Labour historians. This could be asserted to have dated from the predominance of the National Health Service in accounts of the 1945-51 Labour government – Aneurin Bevan's additional responsibility for housing seems to excite less attention.[57]

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[53] Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke, 2001), 125.
[54] For the 1945-51 government, see: Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009), ch.5. For the 1964-70 governments, see: Steven Fielding, *The Labour governments, 1964-70* (Manchester, 2003).
[55] Kevin O. Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History 1945-1990* (Oxford, 1990), 4.
[56] Nuttall, *Psychological socialism*, 30-31.
[57] John Campbell reduced his discussion of Bevan's record on housing to his wider thesis of Bevan's belief in 'failing' socialist doctrine – claiming that decaying council estates in Campbell's time of writing in the late 1980s underlined this 'failure'. John Campbell, *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism* (London, 1987).

One of the more vexed topics for post-1945 Labour historians, 'affluence', is one area in which the urban environment has appeared of more importance – explaining the role of working-class material prosperity in Labour politics in the post-war era requires some consideration of the importance of place, and of the housing market more broadly. The two leading academics in this sub-field of study, Lawrence Black and Jon Lawrence, have considered suburbia as an importance space within which to understand Labour party culture and the attempts of the party to make sense of a changing world.[58] Black has argued that Labour actors took a 'limited and limiting' view of suburban living, despite the fact that it was not as unwelcoming as might have been assumed.[59] Lawrence has claimed that this narrow view reflected an intellectual ignorance of prior social change, given that an early consumerist boom in the 1930s had made suburban living relatively widespread amongst the working classes of the midlands and southern England.[60] Indeed, affluence will be addressed in greater depth in the third chapter of this thesis, though with a wider examination of Labour's thinking about working class prosperity in all types of housing, as well as wider effects on the party's thinking about community.[61]

Studies on Labour, housing and the urban environment have flourished most with local case studies – John Gyford's older account of 'municipal socialism', Nick Tiratsoo's discussion of reconstruction in Coventry, Peter Shapely's study of civically-led redevelopment in Manchester and Salford and Harold Carter's investigation of race and housing provision in Southwark are several strong examples.[62] Studies of constituency Labour parties have had a similar local focus, but are usually a means of exploring broader national issues

[58] Black, *Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*; Jon Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life in Britain, c.1930-64', *Cultural and Social History*, 10:2 (2013), 273-299.
[59] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 190.
[60] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life in Britain', 288.
[61] This reflects Stuart Middleton's recent call to make sense of affluence within its conceptualisation in political discourse, rather than treating it as a "determinate material phenomenon"; Stuart Middleton, ''Affluence' and the Left in Britain, c.1958-1974', *English Historical Review*, 129 (2014),107-138 at 138.
[62] John Gyford, *The Politics of Local Socialism* (London, 1985); Nick Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry*, 1945-1960 (London, 1990); Shapely, *Politics of Housing*; Harold Carter, 'Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark 1945-1995' *The London Journal*, 33:2 (July 2008), 155-185. Further examples would include Zoe Doye, 'The Labour Party and Public Housing, 1951-64: an examination of national policy and its implementation in London', unpublished PhD thesis, Birkbeck University of London (2004); and Matthew Hollow 'Governmentality on the Park Hill estate: the rationality of public housing', *Urban History* 37:1 (2010), 117-135.

rather than local interpretations of housing – Tom Forester's 1976 examination of working class representation within Labour is one such example, whilst Steven Fielding and Duncan Tanner's study of the changing ideological composition of Labour branches in Manchester provides another.[63] An exception to this rule would be Sue Goss's volume on Southwark Labour, which provides an unusually detailed description of the interpretation of party policy locally.[64]

Few studies have taken a broader view of the intersection between Labour, housing and the urban – some exceptions would include Ben Jackson's work on owner-occupation, Peter Weiler's examination of rent control and the land question and Glen O'Hara's survey into governmental experimentation with different types of housing provision.[65] This is by no means confined to Labour: in spite of the self-identification of the Conservatives as the party of the 'property-owning democracy', there have only been a few attempts to inspect Tory political strategy on housing and the urban environment more closely.[66]

Although Paul Readman approvingly noted in 2009 that '…ideology is now taken much more seriously than previously in work on party politics', he did note the occasionally derisive use of ideology as a 'straw man' for the arguments of political historians as they promoted 'sociologically determinist' cases.[67] Whilst this has largely been true since the early 2000s and the onset of the 'new political history', focusing on party culture and identity, a predilection towards Readman's straw men may have limited the number of studies

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[63] Tom Forester, *The Labour Party and the Working Class* (London, 1976); Steven Fielding and Duncan Tanner, 'The 'Rise of the Left Revisited': Labour Party Culture in Post-War Manchester and Salford', *Labour History Review*, 71:3 (2006), 211-233.
[64] Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A study of changing interests, politics and policy in Southwark from 1919 to 1982* (Edinburgh, 1988).
[65] Ben Jackson, 'Revisionism Reconsidered: 'Property-owning Democracy' and Egalitarian Strategy in Post-War Britain' *Twentieth Century British History*, 16:4 (2005), 416-440; Glen O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain: The Paradoxes of Progress, 1951-73* (Basingstoke, 2012); Peter Weiler, 'Labour and the Land: From Municipalization to the Land Commission, 1951-1971', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19:3 (2008), 314-343.
[66] Good examples would include: John Turner, 'A Land Fit for Tories to Live In: The Political Ecology of the British Conservative Party, 1944-94', *Contemporary European History*, 4:2 (1995), 189-208; Alan G.V. Simmonds, 'Conservative governments and the New Town housing question in the 1950s', *Urban History*, 28:1 (2001), 65-83; Alan G.V. Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman: The Origins of the Rent Act, 1957', *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), 843-868; Peter Weiler, 'The Conservatives' Search for a Middle Way in Housing, 1951-64', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14:4 (2003), 360-390; Aled Davies, ''Right to Buy': The Development of a Conservative Housing Policy, 1945-1980', *Contemporary British History*, 27:4 (2013), 421-444.
[67] Paul Readman, 'The State of British Political History', *The Journal of Policy History*, 21:3 (2009), 219-238 at 232.

approaching the question of ideology's influence on policy. Studies into Labour's ideological disposition at various points in the post-war era have generally focused upon the *economic* divide between left and right, with examples of this being Henry Drucker's sceptical 1979 study into whether Labour possessed a coherent ideological bent, and Martin Francis' comprehensive treatise on the political thought of the 1945-51 government.[68]

In more recent years, the 'revisionist' right of Labour associated with Hugh Gaitskell has been of particular interest to historians. As discussed in the previous section, both Ben Jackson and Lawrence Black have contributed works explicitly addressing the socialism of the revisionists and its impact on policy, with important works on Labour ideology and policy also published by Jeremy Nuttall.[69] Jackson in particular has argued that a focus on the economic argument between 'revisionists' and 'Bevanite' left is 'overrated', and instead that the key division was between those who advocated egalitarian redistribution of material wealth and those who believed encouraging fraternal social attitudes was of greater importance.[70] Moreover, the revisionists have come in for particular scrutiny – and will do so again in this thesis – as several of their number remained highly influential within Labour after Gaitskell's death in 1963, most notably Crosland and Roy Jenkins. Further to this, in spite of Harold Wilson's leftist posturing, his own party programme has been asserted to have owed more to revisionist egalitarianism than left thinking.[71] Stuart Middleton has even claimed that '…"affluence" was used as an antonym for "socialism"' by the party's left during the Wilson years.[72] What has been less apparent is the manner in which the Labour left's socialism influenced party policy – beyond the writings of Aneurin Bevan or Richard Crossman, the practical consequences of the left's ideological propensities has often been assumed rather than studied.[73] Nuttall's most recent work on the conception of

[68] Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*; Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*.
[69] Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*; Lawrence Black, 'Social Democracy as a Way of Life: Fellowship and the Socialist Union, 1951–9', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (1999), 499–539; Black, *Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*; Nuttall, *Psychological socialism*; Jeremy Nuttall, 'Pluralism, the People and Time in Labour Party history, 1931-1964', *The Historical Journal*, 56:3 (2013), 729-756. Martin Francis has written on the 1930s and 1940s 'pre-history' of the revisionists in 'Mr Gaitskell's Ganymede? Re-assessing Crosland's The Future of Socialism', *Contemporary British History*, 11:2 (1997), 50-64.
[70] Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, 140 and 162.
[71] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 141.
[72] Middleton, ''Affluence' and the Left in Britain', 137.
[73] Whilst it is notable that both these two towering figures of the left held ministerial responsibility for housing, both had other interests that have overshadowed their specific

time in Labour thought provides some attempt to redress this, as do two closely linked pieces on left attitudes to working-class life by Lise Butler and Alexandre Campsie, but on the specificities of housing and the urban environment, and especially on modernity, what Labour *thought* and what they *did* as a result of this remains elusive.[74] This thesis will seek to close this historiographical gap, through bringing Labour attitudes to the modern and built environment into sharper focus.

The field of post-war housing history and urban history can be roughly divided into four types of account: those that seek to explain the predominance in the British housing market at various points of public housing or owner-occupation (the private rented sector is afforded far less space); scholarship on place and class-based experience; studies on slum clearance and urban redevelopment, often locally focused; and writing on modernity, generally in the form of architectural histories which tend to try to explain 'modern' housing within the architectural profession or construction industry. On the first type, scholars have been prone to see the course of housing history in the twentieth century as a struggle between novel state-sponsored housing and growing owner-occupation.[75] In one of the more polemical (but nonetheless well-read) of these accounts, Alison Ravetz claimed that public housing was a 'cultural colonization' of working-class life by middle-class social reformers, through the moving of the working classes to housing estates.[76] Whilst her acute analysis was not shared by all, much historical writing has been characterised by a sense that the twentieth century saw a little too much state intervention, before a 'natural' move to wider owner-occupation. John Burnett was atypical of this view in his assertion that despite state attempts to change the nature of

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contribution to housing policy. Crossman's diaries are in some senses more revealing of his love of intrigue than the dynamics of his brief: Richard Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume One: Minister of Housing 1964-66* (London, 1975). Even the principal work of scholarship on Crossman contains little of note on housing: Victoria Honeyman, *Richard Crossman: a reforming radical of the Labour Party* (London, 2007). Similarly, Bevan's *In Place of Fear* (London, 1952) has only a very narrow discussion of housing.

[74] Nuttall, 'Pluralism, the People and Time'; Lise Butler, 'Michael Young, the Institute of Community Studies, and the Politics of Kinship', *Twentieth Century British History*, 26:2 (2015), 203-224; Alexandre Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals and the Politics of Everyday Life', *English Historical Review*, 131:548 (2016), 92-121.

[75] Examples include: John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970* (Newton Abbot, 1978); Michael Harloe, *The People's Home? Social Rented Housing in Europe and America* (Oxford,1995); Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke, 1993); Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005); Stephen Merett, *State Housing in Britain* (London, 1979); Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (London, 2001).

[76] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 4.

housing, '…the individual house in a garden has survived as the ideal of the majority of English people - more spacious, lighter, warmer, better fitted and equipped than its ancestor, but in essentials unchanged.'[77] Michael Harloe has argued that housing is such a key commodity within capitalism that the issue is not why housing has not been fully incorporated into the welfare state, but '…why [housing] has sometimes been provided through the agency of the state in partially decommodified form.'[78] Conversely, Martin Daunton claimed in his 1987 account in opposition to this view that 'the rise of owner-occupation is not…a natural phenomenon reflecting deep-seated desires in the population, but rather the creation of particular circumstances.'[79] Daunton instead suggested this assumption had had a stultifying effect on debate about housing policy since 1945, with government policy consisting of '…the alternation of firmly held preconceptions about the tenurial mix.'[80] Given that Daunton was writing in the context of high levels of 'right to buy' under the government of Margaret Thatcher, he may have felt a still greater need to combat rhetoric that presented home ownership as biologically determined. However, he makes a highly astute point – the housing market has been fundamentally altered at various points by *political ideas*, not by dubious notions of English self-sufficiency.

The second type of history noted here – that of place and class experience – has made much of the influence of politics on the home and surroundings. Studies of suburbia and of the home-centred environment particularly focus on the politics of place, coming from different angles – Joanna Bourke having argued that there is no clear definition whatsoever of what might constitute a 'working-class community', whilst Jon Lawrence has suggested more recently that class was a 'mutable concept' and the foundations of the growth of owner-occupation was to be found in the consumerist boom of the inter-war period.[81]

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[77] Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 313.
[78] Harloe, *The People's Home?*, 4.
[79] Martin Daunton, *A Property-Owning Democracy? Housing in Britain* (London, 1987), x.
[80] Ibid., 65.
[81] Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London and New York, 1994), 138; Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life in Britain', 275-276. Other key examples of this scholarship include: Brooke, ''Slumming in Swinging London?''; Mark Clapson, *Invincible green suburbs, brave new towns: Social change and urban dispersal in postwar England* (Manchester, 1998); Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004); Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2 (2005), 341-

There has been an increasing use of the historical work of social scientists in the literature, in a critical manner. Prior to the last fifteen years or so, Michael Young and Peter Willmott's iconic study *Family and Kinship in East London*, published in 1957, had dominated discussion of the effects of postwar housing policy on working-class life.[82] Indeed, the study was and is seminal in its exploration of the idea of community and familial networks; on the fiftieth anniversary of the book's publication in 1957, *The Guardian* referred to it as 'the book that launched a generation of social workers, sociologists and local government officials on their careers.'[83] Whilst the importance of this work should not be understated, and will be examined in Chapter Three of this thesis, Young and Willmott's portrayal of a fixed working-class community resistant to change has been generally overturned by recent work.[84] Studies have emphasised the willingness of some residents of older areas to move, as well as intra-class tensions, some of which Young and Willmott may have downplayed. A further, and final, type of this writing is the literature on the history of poverty and deprivation, which whilst being concerned with social policy has a strong class element. Ian Gazeley revisited the poverty surveys of the 1950s and 1960s in a 2003 volume to emphasise the limited reach of affluence amongst certain segments of the British population, whilst John Welshman's work on the history of the underclass has brought to light those who were in some cases outside of the social system entirely.[85]

Works on post-war slum clearance and urban redevelopment (the third form of writing detailed in this section) form a thinner catalogue than works examining the inter-war period. Most have been based around the implementation of policy: Jim Yelling's incisive, broad-ranging study of post-war

362; Ben Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England* (Manchester, 2012); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-51* (Oxford, 1998); Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England* (Basingstoke, 2009); Simon Szreter, 'Health, Class, Place and Politics: Social Capital and Collective Provision in Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 16:3 (2002), 27-57; Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street'.

[82] Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957).

[83] Madeleine Bunting, 'Kin Outrage', *The Guardian*, 25 April 2007, accessed 24 April 2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2007/apr/25/communities.britishidentityandsociety.

[84] And, as Chapter Three will argue, largely was by their less well-studied later works: Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (London, 1960); Peter Willmott, *The Evolution of a Community: A Study of Dagenham after Forty Years* (London, 1963).

[85] Ian Gazeley, Poverty in Britain 1900-1965 (Basingstoke, 2003); John Welshman, Underclass: A History of the Excluded 1880-2000 (London, 2006). A more polemical take on this literature is provided by Sean Damer, *From Moorepark to 'Wine Alley': The rise and fall of a Glasgow housing scheme* (Edinburgh, 1989).

slum clearance across Britain, Simon Gunn's studies of redevelopment in Bradford and the effect of transport planning, and Peter Larkham and John Pendlebury's examination of reconstruction planning in smaller towns across Britain.[86] Other studies provide insight into particular elements of planning policy – John Davis' examination of the political controversies in the use of compulsory purchase is one such case.[87] It is those works that combine the political, social and functional effects of policy that are of most use in discerning the gap between the aims and reality of slum clearance and urban redevelopment. An exemplar of this type would be Ben Jones' study of slum clearance and the creation of new estates across Brighton. Jones found that Brighton city council's policies of tenant allocation, and later of the sale of high quality council houses, ensured that the stigma of slum areas for impoverished tenants '…pursued them to the suburbs.'[88] As his work in Brighton is principally aimed at assessing the continuities and discontinuities within working-class life on new estates in a local context, Jones is less concerned with the specificities of political ideology regarding public housing, or with the grander, overarching aims attached to slum clearance and the creation of new city areas. This thesis will look more closely at the reasoning behind slum clearance and urban redevelopment, making the case that the remaking of the city was a utopian as much as a utilitarian operation in the eyes of Labour actors.

The fourth type of writing on housing and the urban environment is concerned with grand aims, questioning why modern architecture came to be a part of the twentieth century city. As a concept, modernity has not appeared as frequent a subject in contemporary British history – at least compared to its treatment in academic literary study – as might be expected. Since the release of the edited collections *Moments of Modernity* (1999) and *Meanings of Modernity* (2001), which sought to utilise the modern as a means of explaining historical change in the twentieth century, there has not been a concerted move

[86] Jim Yelling, 'The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85', *Urban History*, 27:2 (2000), 234-254; Simon Gunn, 'The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford, circa 1945-70', *Journal of British Studies*, 49:4, (2010), 849-869; Simon Gunn, 'People and the car: the expansion of automobility in urban Britain, c.1955–70', *Social History*, 38:2 (2013), 220-237; Simon Gunn, 'The Buchanan Report, Environment and the Problem of Traffic in 1960s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 22:4, (2011), 521-542; Peter Larkham and John Pendlebury, 'Reconstruction planning and the small town in early post-war Britain', *Planning Perspectives*, 23 (2008), 291-321.
[87] John Davis, 'Macmillan's martyr: the Pilgrim case, the 'land grab' and the Tory housing drive, 1951-9', *Planning Perspectives*, 23:2, 125-146.
[88] Jones, 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization', 537; Jones, *The working class*.

within the academy to expand upon this work.[89] This may be due to the greater interest in historical works on the competing meta-narratives of 'affluence' and 'decline', the former addressed in the earlier Labour section. Decline, or 'declinism' – its late twentieth century incarnation itself a response to the failure of modernism – is briefly a means of understanding Britain's relative economic decline in the twentieth century, as well as the domestic effects of the end of empire. As Robert Eccleshall noted in 2000, it has had an important influence on politics, remarking that 'politicians have been flexible and creative in articulating the British malady for electoral purposes, sometimes denying its existence but often fabricating it into some pressing crisis for which they purport to have a panacea.'[90]

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, the countervailing modernist narrative to a perception of decline (or perhaps simply stagnation) will be explored. Much like modernity, decline has not been a constant feature of the historiographical landscape, and opinion remains divided on how useful a term it might be. One of the foremost authors in this field, Jim Tomlinson, has recently suggested that 'de-industrialisation' might be a more appropriate means of understanding economic change in Britain.[91] Where modernity has recently been a topic of study, it has been divided between a wide range of topics and time periods. In addition to architecture, recent studies of the post-1945 era include Ben Jones and Rebecca Searle's examination of depictions of the modern in wartime film, Timothy Cooper's discussion of early environmentalism and the politics of waste and Guy Ortalano's re-examination of C.P. Snow's attack on literary criticism as the weaker of the 'two cultures' of the modern age (the other being science).[92]

Scholarship on the relationship of modernity to architecture and the urban environment has been far more focused, not least due to the clearly discernible modern movement within the architectural profession. As previously

[89] Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds.) *Moments of Modernity*; Daunton and Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity*.
[90] Robert Eccleshall, 'Party Ideology and National Decline' in Richard English and Michael Kenny (eds.), *Rethinking British Decline* (Basingstoke, 2000), 155-183 at 157.
[91] Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2001); Jim Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization not decline: a new meta-narrative for post-war British history', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14:3 (2016), 201-221.
[92] Ben Jones and Rebecca Searle, 'Humphrey Jennings, the Left and the experience of Modernity in mid-twentieth century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 75 (2013), 190-212; Timothy Cooper, 'Modernity and the politics of waste in Britain' in Sverker Sorlin and Paul Warde (ed.), *Nature's end: history and the environment* (Basingstoke, 2009); Guy Ortolano, 'The literature and the science of 'two cultures' historiography', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 39:1 (2008), 143-150.

cited, Glendinning and Muthesius' *Tower Block* and Dunleavy's *Politics of Mass Housing* are two of the more significant studies, but to this can be added a range of other works. One of the first major historiographical responses to high-rise modernist housing was a 1974 edited volume by Anthony Sutcliffe, in which he and a range of contributors attempted to explain '…the development of a deviant, arguably inferior, dwelling-type…'[93] This bellicose reading of modern architecture, with Sutcliffe and his cohorts arguing that flats had only 'meagre virtues' in comparison with the 'cottage or villa', set the tone for discussions of this form.[94] Dunleavy's critique of modern housing as an imposition of little merit was followed by the eminent planner Peter Hall's claim that the promotion of modern architecture in the post-war period by the Architectural Association turned the 'juvenile fantasy' of Le Corbusier-admiring students into reality.[95] Despite Glendinning and Muthesius' spirited attempt to set the record straight, writing on modern architecture remains something of a battleground, if one that has gradually swung the way of more nuanced pro-modernists in recent years. John R. Gold's masterful two volumes, composed of interviews with key architects and archival material, provides a considered study of how modern architecture came about between 1928 and 1972 as well as its flaws, whilst Alan Powers has remarked that 'the Modern Movement was meant to make people happy, but it offered a limited set of ways of doing so, and underestimated the complexity of human responses to such compulsion.'[96] This view that the architects and planners channelling modernism were trying to do something positive, but failing to reconcile this with popular desires, is also reflected in Simon Gunn's study of Bradford and Peter Mandler's investigation of town centre planning in the post-war period, as well as in Guy Ortalano's illuminating piece on the visionary plans for Milton Keynes.[97]

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[93] Anthony Sutcliffe, 'Preface' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London, 1974), ix-x at ix.
[94] Anthony Sutcliffe 'Introduction' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London, 1974), 1-18 at 2.
[95] Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1988), 222.
[96] John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism* (London, 1997); John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism* (London, 2007); Alan Powers *Britain: modern architectures in history* (London, 2007), 163-4.
[97] Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism'; Mandler, 'New Towns for Old?' in Conekin, Mort and Waters (ed.) *Moments of Modernity*; Guy Ortalano, 'Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), 477-507.

Modernity has increasingly been situated as a limited 'moment' in history, rather than simply a movement that ran out of energy. Examples of this include Becky Conekin's study of the 1951 Festival of Britain and Otto Saumarez Smith's commentary on the influence of modern architecture within central government, both Conservative and Labour.[98] In terms of the architectural reaction to modernity – the rise of conservationism and 'period' architecture – a substantial body of literature arose in the 1980s, but since Patrick Wright and Raphael Samuel's major works on the relationship between modernity and conservationism in the 1980s and 1990s, there have been few interventions into this topic.[99] Joe Moran's discussion of gentrification in 1970s London, and Erika Hanna's study of the responses to conservationism in Dublin represent two recent attempts to broaden the field.[100] There remains, however, a palpable lack of scholarship drawing together politics, modernity and the urban environment in a way that assesses the ideological thinking behind the architectural and social outcomes of such projects. In effect, this thesis will aim to actively engage with the various forms of modernity that were understood by Labour actors at the time of application, rather than seeing these conceptions as inconsequential at best, and warped at worst.

This thesis invites an academic reconsideration of the modern project by studying the political formulation of urban transformation in post-1945 Britain. It builds upon the scholarship in Labour history, the history of housing and the urban environment, and histories of modernity cited in this section, to re-examine the 'modern moment' in post-war British history. Further to this, it advances the claim that understanding the *political* appreciation of modernity is integral to a complete comprehension of the urban change in this period. Conversely, it challenges the dominant notion in urban history that the creation and re-creation of the urban environment is the outcome of rational, pragmatic decision making or of bureaucratic incompetence – whilst there is undoubtedly always an element of that, ideology and sheer conviction do play an important part, and this should not be overlooked. This argument emphasises that

[98] Becky Conekin, *'The autobiography of a nation': The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003); Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment.'
[99] Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford, 2009) 1st published 1985; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994).
[100] Joe Moran, 'Early Cultures of Gentrification in London, 1955-1980', *Urban History*, 34 (2007), 101-122; Erika Hanna, ''Don't make Dublin a Museum': Urban Heritage and Modern Architecture in Dublin, 1957-71', *Past and Present*, Supplement 10 (2015), 349-367.

Labour's reading of the modern could be as complex and as contradictory as its own socialism.

After a visit to Cumbernauld New Town outside Glasgow in February 1965, the then-housing minister Richard Crossman recorded in his diary that the town was filled with a 'fascinating variety of modern houses', all in a '…tremendously austere, exhilarating, uncomfortable style.'[101] In spite of this range of emotions, Crossman reflected three days later on a visit to Welwyn New Town, developed from a garden city, that '…I can see that the vast majority of British people would probably prefer to live in Welwyn with its red bricks and its North Oxford lilac.' However, as he drove away from his next New Town visit to Stevenage, Crossman '…felt no doubt that the modern style of house-building in our New Towns is something original and creative.'[102] Crossman's own conservative tastes and mixed feelings about modernity were not atypical of many within Labour – committed to the *spirit* of modernity, but perhaps quieter in their personal tastes. This thesis will seek to move beyond the existing literature on the transformation of the British urban environment after 1945, and of the Labour Party, in seeing the mid-twentieth century as an authentically 'modern moment'.

Method and Scope of this study

Over the course of this study, a broad range of primary sources will be utilised to explore the four research questions detailed. This section will briefly discuss the principal types of sources used and explain why they have been selected, as well as addressing the scope of this study. Three sets of sources will be discussed: firstly, archival sources, including Labour Party publications and internal correspondence, and the personal papers of certain political figures; secondly, published sociological studies from the period in question; and thirdly, oral history interviews with individuals involved with urban redevelopment and house-building during the period studied, or with particular knowledge of these topics in their relation to Labour.

In approaching the task of delving into Labour's role in the urban transformation of Britain after 1945, and what this might have owed to

[101] Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 158.
[102] Ibid., 159-160.

'modernity', the Labour party *as a whole* has been focused upon, not just a few 'great men' of the party. Given the fluid nature of the definitions of 'modernity' and 'socialism', a broad understanding of what the rank and file as well as the leading lights of Labour thought about the process of urban change is necessary to judge the extent to which elements of these concepts were imbibed by those within the party. Moreover, Ben Jackson has suggested that it is '…misleading to see political ideology as the product of isolated theorists when it usually emerges from the collaborative efforts of groups…'[103] This considered, political opinion on the urban has been examined through a diverse range of media, including books, pamphlets, periodicals and party documents.

The Labour Party Research Department played a consistent part in party discussion and the production of party literature on housing and the urban environment. Equally, the shifting membership of National Executive Committee (NEC) sub-committees on planning, housing and transport had a key place in policy deliberation. Members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, Labour councillors and individual Labour activists also had clear effects on urban discussion, whether Parliamentary debates, circulars, newspapers such as *Forward*, magazines such as *Socialist Commentary* or *Labour Woman*. Local initiatives also played their part, as well as contributions from the floor at the annual party conference. Other organisations' material on housing are also included, such as the Fabian Society, trade unions and the Co-operative Party. Views of modernity from the far Left of British politics – primarily the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and anarchist writers – will additionally be presented as an alternative vision of a leftist urban future. These sources have principally been drawn from the Labour History Archive at the People's History Museum in Manchester, the repository for the Labour Party's archives.

The papers of Peter Shore – secretary of the Research Department 1959-64 then MP for Stepney from 1964 – also provide a wealth of party material and are drawn from the archives of the London School of Economics, as is the archive of Fabian Society pamphlets and the Labour paper *Tribune*. Other personal papers from the LSE archives drawn upon include those of James MacColl MP, Tony Crosland MP, William Beveridge and Brian Abel-Smith – all of whom offer a distinct outlook on housing and the urban environment after 1945. MacColl, MP for Widnes, served as Parliamentary

[103] Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, 4.

Private Secretary to both Crossman and his successor as Minister for Housing and was described by the former as a 'reactionary high churchman who really is an expert on housing.'[104] Yet his expertise has largely been lost to posterity, despite the high regard for MacColl in his day. The Working Class Movement Library in Manchester has provided the personal papers of Frank Allaun, MP for Salford East and a constant campaigner for better housing (though far less well-known for this) – his collection includes a large stock of the regional Labour newspaper *Labour's Northern Voice*, which he edited. In addition, some local party material from Birmingham City Library will be drawn upon to provide a civic insight into housing and urban policy, in a major city which experienced a modern transformation.

The social sciences were a relatively new set of disciplines in the post-war period, with new studies of Britain often focused on working life, class distinctions and the urban living environment. Moreover, many of the practitioners of sociology, anthropology and political science were from the Left of British politics – Young and Willmott, previously mentioned, were strong supporters of the Labour Party, with Young actually the secretary of the research department from 1945-50, whilst figures such as Ruth Glass (née Durant) and Charles Madge were associated with the CPGB. By the mid to late 1950s, actors on the revisionist wing of Labour in particular had acquired an interest in social science research, with Tony Crosland drawing upon recent research in *The Future of Socialism*, and regular features utilising research in the revisionist journal *Socialist Commentary*. In this regard, the manner in which social science research was written can be studied as a form of post-war political opinion. The urban character of much of this published research – studying new towns, slum clearance and urban redevelopment, modern housing and a constant research interest in the conception of community – offers a hitherto understudied resource for examining the portrayal of urban change in the post-war period. Although, as the literature review documented, social science material has become increasingly utilised to provide insights into working-class life by historians, it has been less well used in examining how it influenced political portrayals of urban change and modern life, as well as offering a contrast to these portrayals. This thesis will therefore draw upon the published work of researchers such as Norman Dennis, Pearl Jephcott, Hilda

[104] Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 32.

Jennings, Margaret Stacey, John Mogey, as well as the arguably dominant figures Young and Willmott, to add a further dimension to the thesis' discussion of Labour, modernity and the urban environment.[105]

Oral history interviews will be the third and final type of primary source employed in this thesis. As a study into perceptions of urban transformation and understandings of modernity, interviews with Labour figures and those involved in the process of change can add an alternative viewpoint to those derived purely from written primary sources. This thesis was originally conceived as a series of local case studies based on Dunleavy's study of Birmingham, Bristol and the London borough of Newham, before moving to a national study in order to capture a broader swathe of attitudes and opinions. One set of interviews, therefore, has been drawn from actors within Newham. The actors interviewed include: Keith Hasler, Labour councillor for a West Ham ward from 1964; Ken Lund, a council architect for West Ham from 1961 and later Borough Architect for Newham; Barry Simons, Director of Housing in Newham from 1984, who offered a fascinating perspective on the aftermath of Newham's modern transformation; and Stephen Timms, current Labour MP for East Ham since 1997, and prior to that a councillor in Newham from 1984 before becoming council leader. One interview is from a Bristol councillor, John Maclaren, active in Labour politics from the late 1950s before being elected onto Bristol City Council in 1973, who offered a portrait of Labour politics in a southern English city outside of London. Lord Roy Hattersley, a Labour councillor in Sheffield from 1956, before becoming chairman of the housing committee and then MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook from 1964-1997, provided an engrossing view of a major Labour city, as well as a further sense of the view from Westminster in the period. Finally, Hillary Benn, MP for Leeds Central since 1999 was interviewed in his capacity as Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in 2014, to provide a present-day Labour perception of 'community' to balance against past understandings in chapter three. Two of the seven interviews were conducted by telephone (Lund and

[105] J.M. Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (Oxford, 1956); Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*; Young and Willmott, *Family and Class*; Willmott, *The Evolution of a Community*; Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury* (Oxford, 1960); Hilda Jennings, *Societies in the Making: A Study of Development and Redevelopment Within a County Borough* (London, 1962); Norman Dennis, *People and Planning: The Sociology of Housing in Sunderland* (London, 1970); Pearl Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats: some of the human problems involved in multi-storey housing* (Edinburgh, 1971).

Benn), but in each case the interview was semi-structured, with a series of questions on housing, the urban environment and Labour politics. Each of these interviews allows an additional level of understanding to be reached in this thesis.

Homes of the Future: Labour and urban transformation, 1945-70

In 1962, an industrial film was produced for the National Coal Board's cine-magazine *Mining Review*, showcasing the New Town of Peterlee in County Durham, built to house mining families. The film shows a vista of highly modern, bright houses and low-rise flats, contrasted with the old mining cottages of the surrounding villages. As the narrator commented, 'the master of painting at Durham University was appointed to collaborate with two architects of the corporation's staff. Together, they have produced homes of the future.'[106] It might be said that this was the picture of modernity that Labour had hoped for, though Peterlee was far from typical. Built to house only 30,000 residents, Peterlee had been requested by the local miners and a development corporation was formed in 1948. Although the architect Berthold Lubetkin had been involved in the initial planning of the New Town, Lubetkin's ideas for high flat-blocks were scrapped due to the geological instability of the mining area and the architect-painter team described in the film installed.[107] Whilst the result was generally well appreciated, in a 1979 BBC documentary on New Towns, the writer Colin Ward remarked that Peterlee was so bound up with the coal industry that unemployment had become rife as mining declined.[108] The story of Peterlee encapsulates the complexity of the modern moment. Although it bears notice that the New Towns as much as the high-rise blocks only ever represented a limited proportion of the total amount of housing built after 1945, both have been given an iconic (if not infamous) status as the physical representation of modernity.[109] The film of Peterlee demonstrates a point in

[106] *Mining Review*, 15:5 (1962) accessed online 27 February 2016 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uc_jnGcEc00
[107] After being rebuffed, Lubetkin went to his pig farm in Gloucestershire, before being commissioned to build the Cranbrook, Dorset and Lakeview council estates in Bethnal Green.
[108] BBC, 'Where we live now: New Town, Home Town' (1979) accessed online 27 February 2016 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01rk56y/where-we-live-now-3-new-town-home-town. Peterlee's association with the coal industry even extended to its name, given in honour of the Durham miners' leader Peter Lee.
[109] Though New Towns such as Bracknell or Hemel Hempstead have attracted less controversy, and are almost genteel at the time of writing.

time in which Labour in particular believed the modern was within reach, and were ambitious in their plans for Britain's urban environment. This thesis aims to put this urban vision back to centre stage as a *political* phenomenon (as much as cultural or architectural) in order to understand the formulation and consequences of urban change in Britain between 1945 and 1970.

The inquiry of this thesis into Labour conceptions of modern, urban transformation in the post-war period will span four chapters, each analysing a different part of this vision. Chapter One will examine Labour's understanding of the housing market, determining what place public housing, owner-occupation and the private rented sector – including the council tenant, the owner-occupier, the private tenant and the landlord – as well as alternative forms of tenure, had in a Labour view of the modern urban environment. It will assess how the basic unit of the Labour's urban vision – the modern home – was debated, questioning in particular why housing was seen as so important by Labour to their overall plans. Chapter Two will look beyond the home to the wider cityscape, and explore Labour's approach to urban planning, land control, slum clearance and urban transport. Through taking a broad view of the ways in which Labour shaped and reshaped the urban environment, Chapter Two will assess the socialist, modern vision that the party contemplated and attempted to set in motion. Chapter Three will assess the fraught question of class – including the extent to which Labour actors viewed its housing plans as classless or for the working classes – in addition to the importance of Labour understandings of community in its urban plans, before discussing the role of design, architecture and building innovation in visions of an urban future. Chapter Four will question the role of history and of modernity in the overall picture of the urban future imagined and propagated by Labour – seeking to examine why a party so fascinated by the past, both its own and otherwise, could nonetheless advance a vision of progress based upon the sweeping aside of the old. Finally, the Conclusion will consider what Labour's experience of modernism reveals about the ways in which urban history is written and understood, as well as how Labour's rationale for reshaping the urban environment might influence future study. Across the four chapters, the core research questions will be explored: why did slum clearance and urban redevelopment often result in 'modern' forms of housing – and why is the legacy of this sort of housing in particular so contested; how did those within Labour

understand ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’ – and what did this mean for housing and the urban environment; how did Labour actors understand ‘modern life’, in terms of housing and the urban environment; and why did Labour actors regard quality housing as a solution to urban deprivation – and why did urban poverty remain resilient throughout the post-war era. The four chapters will make the claim that bricks, mortar and bulldozers of urban transformation in post-war Britain represented a political vision of the future, as much as the outcome of hard-nosed pragmatism.

Raymond Williams considered in 1961 that ‘we think of the new housing estates, the new suburbs and the new towns as characteristic of the new Britain.’[110] This aspect of the ‘new Britain’ of the sixties that Williams described – the urban built environment – is the part most visible in the present day, and perhaps the most fraught legacy. But less thought has been given to the reasoning behind the new housing estates, new suburbs and new towns of which Williams wrote. Indeed, as he stated, ‘…these communities were not planned by the people who live in them, but by others with their own versions of what these people needed and what a community is.’[111] Whilst these planners have often been thought of as malign, the *political* reasoning behind this transformation has been less well considered. Leif Jerram captures this dual meaning, noting that planning can embody ‘the recognition by the state and its angry citizens that “something must be done”’ *in addition to* ‘[standing] as a byword for the failures of the state.’[112] The purpose of this thesis is to challenge the notion that an understanding of the modern moment in twentieth century British history begins and ends with the tower block as an unwelcome imposition. Instead, this thesis will argue that a clear comprehension of Labour’s political aims for the urban environment are necessary to a broader awareness of *why* urban Britain changed so radically between 1945 and 1970. Without this, the modern moment will continue to appear as little more than a brutal misjudgement.

[110] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London, 1961), 359.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Leif Jerram, *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe’s Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2011), 318.

Chapter One: Labour and the Housing Market

Landlords, Owner-Occupiers and Council Tenants

Introduction

'Good housing is an elementary social need as much as water,' wrote Jean Copeland in 1948, 'but it continued to depend on cash for very much longer.'[1] Those within Labour were concerned with the physical reconstruction of British cities, and intended to reshape the housing market in a modern, socialist form. Indeed, Martin Francis has pointed to Aneurin Bevan's focus on 'quality' and 'need' in his role as Minister of Health from 1945-51 (with responsibility for housing) as evidence of 'specifically socialist content' in Labour planning.[2] But where did socialism meet a sense of modernity? Copeland went on to argue that 'in the twenty years between the two wars it was largely assumed that the only necessary action was to permit the red-brick blotches to break out all over the countryside and let the first-comers buy them.'[3] In contrast to the narrow focus on homes for sale by Conservative-led government, Labour indicated that a modern, *efficient* housing market would be one that was planned. If anything, Labour became more strident in this view in the years between 1945 and 1970, though their deliberations were not without ambiguity. In a 1965 newsletter to Labour councillors, it was remarked that 'of all the social services – though it is often not regarded as a social service – the needs of housing are the most pressing.'[4] The manner in which Labour aimed to create a 'social service' – even if their efforts to do so were occasionally contradictory – is integral to understanding how a wider urban transformation was to be enacted at the level of housing tenure. Though it might appear prosaic, the dynamic of the housing market was as much an agent of the modern change Labour desired as the architectural end products.

Housing had (and continues to have) a special place in the Labour tradition. Although housing could undoubtedly be an emotive issue for political

[1] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Labour Party, *A Guide to Post-War Housing Policy* (1948), 18.
[2] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 130.
[3] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 18.
[4] LHA, Labour Party Research Department (hereafter LPRD), *Partnership* (October 1965), 1.

parties of all stripes in the mid-twentieth century, Labour had associated itself with not only better but fairer housing since its foundation. Laura Beers has argued that during the 1945 election campaign 'the public believed that Labour was more committed to home-building because it spent more time publicizing its commitment to building homes', but it is also plausible that the genuine fervour that Labour activists felt on the subject of housing expressed itself.[5] If the 1945 welfare state is taken as a rough indication of what Labour's belief in a modern, socialist state entailed, the extent to which 'decent housing' was afforded the same platform as education, health and full employment bears some scrutiny. Whilst the latter features of the welfare state retain a certain purchase on the popular mindset – in the respective forms of the National Health Service, state education and public pensions – the state role in housing is rarely registered as an integral part of contemporary welfare. Though only a proportion of the British population will have lived in a council house or flat through the period 1945-70, when one adds to that number all who might have lived in a rent-controlled private house or flat, or all who may have directly or indirectly benefited from a state-sponsored or state-supported mortgage (or mortgage relief) on their property, the hypothetical total for whom the politics of public policy mattered seems rather more significant. As Danny Dorling has recently stated, 'policy on housing is different from policy on employment, crime, defence, health or education. Policy on housing touches everyone.'[6]

Table 1: *Permanent dwellings completed in Great Britain, 1945-70.*

YEAR	Local Authorities	Private	Total
1945	1,936	1,099	3,035
1946	25,245	30,566	55,811
1947	98,028	41,487	139,515
1948	193,548	34,390	227,938
1949	170,806	28,457	199,263
1950	167,917	30,240	198,157
1951	166,483	25,485	191,968

[5] Laura Beers, 'Labour's Britain, Fight for it Now!', *The Historical Journal*, 52:3 (2009), 667-695 at 683-4.
[6] Dorling, *All that is Solid*, 14.

1952	199,177	36,670	235,847
1953	244,916	64,867	309,783
1954	239,318	92,423	331,741
1955	196,024	116,093	312,117
1956	167,710	126,431	294,141
1957	169,629	128,724	298,353
1958	143,283	130,220	273,503
1959	124,545	153,166	277,711
1960	128,216	171,405	299,621
1961	116,118	180,727	296,845
1962	128,577	178,211	306,788
1963	123,903	177,787	301,690
1964	154,754	221,264	376,018
1965	164,547	217,162	381,709
1966	176,871	208,647	385,518
1967	199,749	204,208	403,957
1968	187,964	226,067	414,031
1969	180,958	185,917	366,875
1970	176,926	174,342	351,268

Source: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988).

This takes on additional meaning when it is considered just how many homes were built in the period 1945-70. Table 1 above shows the permanent dwellings completed in these years, with the exceptionally high completions in the 1960s particularly eye-catching. The period 1945 to 1970 saw a radical shift in the proportions of public housing and owner-occupation, with a synchronous fall in the numbers of persons renting from private landlords. Martin Daunton has suggested that this was a continuation of changes that had been occurring since 1918, asserting that ‘a new tenurial pattern emerged between the wars,

based on two main features: owner-occupation and public rental.'[7] Indeed, even in 1967, the highest ever year of completions by local authorities in which some 199,749 homes were built, private builders constructed 204,208 dwellings.[8] It therefore stands that to comprehend the course of Labour's attempt to reshape the housing market in the post-war period, all tenures should be examined. Studies of party policy beyond the post-war council home and moreover, what housing policy *meant* in a wider sense for Labour aims, are surprisingly absent in the existing historiography.[9] This chapter addresses two research questions: first, how those within Labour understood modernity, and what this meant for the urban environment; and second, why Labour actors regarded housing as a solution to urban deprivation, and why poverty nonetheless remained resilient. Giving equal weight to all housing tenures within Labour housing policy allows for a comprehensive means of understanding how housing expressed Labour's modern, socialist aims for the post-war period.

These aims are encapsulated within Figure 1 below. It shows a

It's an ill wind

It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Four years of Tory Government has been an ill enough wind for most Birmingham people, but there have been some winners!

WINNERS

THE LANDLORD

Thanks to the Tories he has been able to knock louder and louder for higher rents. The Tories' Housing Rents and Repair Bill—the "landlord's charter"—was only the thin end of the wedge. Now comes a threat to revise the Rent Restrictions Acts. The outcome can only be **greater** benefits for the landlord.

THE MONEYLENDER AND FINANCIER

Here's a chap who has had one long continual joy ride since the Tories came to power, the pushing up of the bank rate has meant that the big financiers have slapped higher interest charges on their loans. This has meant dearer homes and higher rates.

THE RICH

Successive budgets and increased dividends have poured money into the pockets of the wealthy. The April "Election" budget gave surtax payers tax concessions of £25,000,000. Now the rich can relax while the burden of the nation's recovery falls upon the poor.

THE TYCOON

No tears glint behind those spectacles because of Tory rule. The boys of BIG business are enjoying a cosy time under a benevolent Mr. Butler. Capital gains, bonus issues, easy profits, freedom for the monopolists and price ringers . . . what more could a city slicker ask for ?

LOSERS

THE HOUSEWIFE

Poor Mum ! For four years she has watched the cost of living zoom under the Tories. The crippling new purchase tax increases rocket the price of kitchen and household goods.

THE SMALL TRADER

The rising tide of prices under Tory rule has kept the ordinary housewife's shopping list down and Mr. Butler's credit squeeze hasn't helped. Now comes another blow for him—the new increases in telephone charges are double what they are for the big business subscriber.

THE TENANT

The Tories show no mercy to tenants. Two and a-half million Council tenants will soon be paying more because of the slashing of the subsidies. Landlords of private property will soon have the "green light" to put up rents as well.

THE OWNER-OCCUPIER

He has already been hard hit by the Tories who have on several occasions increased the amount of his mortgage payments. Now rates are almost certain to go up.

THE NEWLY WEDS

Not only are homes costing far more whether you rent or buy, but Mr. Butler's crisis budget, by increasing purchase tax, has sent the price of furniture and household goods higher still.

Figure 1: Birmingham Borough Labour Party recruitment leaflet, c.1955.
Source: Birmingham City Archives.

recruitment leaflet by Birmingham Borough Labour Party, circulated in 1955.

[7] Daunton, *Property-Owning Democracy*, 4.
[8] See Table 1.
[9] Notable exceptions to this rule include, on the private landlord: Shapely, *Politics of Housing* and Weiler, 'Labour and the Land.' On owner-occupation: Jackson, 'Revisionism Reconsidered' and Black, *Political Culture of the Left*.

Birmingham Labour's rhetoric stands as an effective summary of Labour's attitude towards the housing tenures throughout the period. As shown in the leaflet, Labour regarded the private landlord as the villain of the piece, knocking 'louder and louder for higher rents.'[10] Labour had a contentious relationship with the private landlord throughout the period, veering from calling for the outright abolition of private renting and, on the other hand, attempting to create a fairer renting system. At the heart of this was a sense by those within Labour that tenants stood to be exploited by the private landlord – and indeed, in the leaflet they are the supposed 'losers' from Conservative policy. Tony Crosland would write in 1962 that 'private landlordism is not an appropriate form of house-ownership in an advanced society' and his view was relatively commonplace amongst Labour members.[11]

Another 'loser' in the leaflet was the owner-occupier, with their mortgage and rates being increased by the Tories. Owner-occupation remains, curiously, to be believed an anathema to those on the left of British politics. In his widely read 2011 *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, Owen Jones felt compelled to state that owner-occupation did not lead working-class families to become middle class.[12] Similarly, in the course of explaining Labour decline, Ross McKibbin has recently insisted that 'governments have long favoured, in one way or another, private home ownership', though his assertion is heavily based on the manner in which the market has changed since the 1980 Housing Act, which introduced the Conservative 'Right to Buy' scheme of selling council housing.[13] Far from uniform condemnation of the 'property-owning democracy' of mass owner-occupation cherished by the Conservatives, Labour both engaged with the concept and offered their own socialist alternative to it. Governments of all stripes have favoured *access* to a good home for all, but the Conservatives are the only party to have explicitly specified the private home, and only in a broader sense since the late 1940s.

Conversely, Labour undoubtedly promoted public housing as something of a 'vanguard' tenure, acting as an indicator of the modern, socialist future to

[10] Figure 1: Birmingham City Archives (hereafter BCA), 329.94249, Birmingham Borough Labour Party, Recruitment Leaflet (1955).
[11] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 189-190.
[12] Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London, 2011), 60.
[13] Ross McKibbin, 'A Brief Supremacy: the Fragmentation of the Two-Party System in British Politics, c.1950-2015', *Twentieth Century British History*, advance access doi: 10.1093/tcbh/hww006, 14.

come. In this regard, Chapter Three will go on to address the social meaning of the council home. However, Labour expressed considerable uncertainty on how public housing should be financed, and at what level rents should be set. Equally, alternatives to the state provision of public housing struggled to gain traction within Labour, in a manner that would seem to echo Simon Szreter's comment that the welfare state was formed of 'benevolent and paternalistic' class prejudices.[14] Drawing together the changes to the 'tenurial pattern' allows for a clearer understanding of what housing meant for Labour's modern, socialist ambitions than has previously been possible. What part then did Labour's modern, socialist urge for change play in the reshaping of the housing market?

Private Property or Public Ownership: Labour and the landlord

Whilst it is true that the Labour Party had never been the most strident supporter of the landlord, the vehemence with which the party attacked private landlords in the 1950s far exceeded anything that had gone before. The assault on 'landlordism' was closely connected to what the party perceived as the Conservative government's failure in housing. Indeed, the Tory emphasis on increasing owner-occupation and linking public housing to slum clearance was thought to be excluding significant numbers of those trapped within low-quality inner-city privately rented stock.[15] Moreover, Labour began to view the figure of the landlord as a Victorian anachronism, out of step with the march of modernity. Following the liberalisation of rent control by the Conservative government in 1957, Labour responded with even more zealous condemnation of the iniquities of capitalism, caricatured as the greedy landlord. Problems with private rental identified prior to 1945, and seemingly rampant by the 1950s, gave Labour strong grounds to argue that the housing market was failing and that the state needed to step in even more decisively. Labour policy was conflicted, however, about whether the state should simply demand greater improvement of private rented property, or to 'municipalise' rented property through local authorities. Although Peter Weiler has examined municipalisation in the context of Labour thought on land control, whilst Alan Simmonds and

[14] Szreter, 'Health, Class, Place and Politics', 48.
[15] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 82.

John Davis have both discussed the political impact of the 1957 Rent Act, no study has examined the place of the private landlord in wider Labour plans for urban transformation.[16] Party perceptions of whether a modern, socialist approach would be to manage or abolish 'landlordism' would have major consequences for British cities in the mid-twentieth century.

Writing in 1913, the Scottish Labourite John Wheatley attacked the private landlord as responsible for the slum living conditions of the Glaswegian poor. He claimed that slum life was so dreadful that it had finally eliminated the notion 'that an individual or family can have security for its own health and happiness in a community where thousands are being physically and morally ruined.'[17] Wheatley set a precedent for Labour thought, advocating the municipal oversight of landlords because of the effect of unfair rents on the wider housing market. In 1913, Glasgow actually had large numbers of empty houses at rents the working-class populace could not afford.[18] The absurdity of crowding the city's poor into low-quality property that they could barely afford whilst houses lay empty, was in the view of those within the Labour movement, evidence of the inability of the market to provide adequate housing at a fair price. Correspondingly, Wheatley played a major part in the 1915 Glasgow Rent Strike (which caused the first phase of rent control) and later, as Minister of Health in the first Labour government of 1924, introduced legislation to vastly increase the provision of public housing as a direct riposte to the private sector.[19] Labour actors believed the private landlord meant at best exploitation, and at worst prevailing slum conditions, and by the close of the Second World War the party directly associated landlordism with the ills of British cities. In a Birmingham City Council discussion of 1945, one Labour councillor argued against compensating slum landlords in the case that property had to be taken over and repaired, suggesting that the council health inspectors did not compensate for 'diseased meat'. He continued: 'Why should we compensate for diseased houses? We have paid compensation already - in the higher infant

[16] John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12:1 (2001), 69-92; Alan G.V. Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman: The Origins of the Rent Act, 1957', *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), 843-868; Weiler, 'Labour and the Land.'
[17] LHA, LP/362.5/318, John Wheatley, *Eight-Pound Cottages for Glasgow Citizens* (1913), 4.
[18] J.J. Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896-1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism* (East Linton, 2000), 69.
[19] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 33.

mortality rates of our central wards.'[20] If the slum landlord was little better than the butcher with flies buzzing in his shop, then Labour intolerance to the landlord could only grow. However, Labour's tenure in government between 1945 and 1951 saw very little slum clearance. Instead, Aneurin Bevan led a close focus on public house building. As Martin Francis has commented, Bevan failed '…to adopt a coherent policy towards those aspects of housing that lay outside the local authority building programme [existing owner-occupation and private rented].'[21] Labour's concern for increasing public housing would leave the private rented stock in a state of stagnation for their six years in government.

The strength of Labour disdain for 'landlordism' became most apparent in the context of opposition following the party's defeat in the 1951 general election. Whilst the Conservative government did not immediately seek an end to the existing system of rent control in the private rented sector, the two major landlord organisations – the Association of Land and Property Owners (ALPO) and the National Federation of Property Owners (NFPO) – campaigned against rent controls, and held influence in Tory circles.[22] By the early 1950s, much of the private rented stock for those of lower incomes was in a state of decay, and a large part were subject to rent control. Two distinct phases of rent control had occurred, both prompted by war: first, houses controlled during the First World War, which in many cases were still let at almost the same rent as in 1915 (provided the tenant was the same person); and second, tenancies were held at levels set in 1939 under the Rent Mortgage Restrictions Act, which had increased the number of controlled dwellings to ten million.[23] Rising repair bills – estimated to have increased by 316% between 1939 and 1953 – had meant that by the 1950s landlords could not hope to recoup their losses though rent[24]. Additionally, the fact that rents could only be raised if the sitting tenant was ousted resulted in some more unscrupulous landlords resorting to harassment or deliberate neglect. Conservative opinion was largely sympathetic to the seeming plight of the landlord – Tories tended to believe that rent control was a negative force on the housing market, allowing tenants to benefit from 'cheap

[20] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Town Crier* (17 March 1945), 8.
[21] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 130.
[22] Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman', 853.
[23] Ibid., 849
[24] Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London', 74.

housing.'[25] At the same time, the Conservatives had reduced subsidies for public housing on taking office in 1951, and did not undertake to clear the slums.[26] Whilst the Tories saw the dilapidation of the rented housing stock as an indication that landlords were struggling, those within Labour began to conclude that the private landlord was guilty of a callous disregard for healthy living conditions – willing to take the tenants' rent, but not to patch a leaking roof. Worse still, the image of decaying, Victorian slums posed a clear challenge to Labour visions of an orderly urban future.

In 1952, the Labour-supporting economist Denys Lawrence Munby remarked in a pamphlet that '…the continued private ownership of houses to rent is likely to become more and more incompatible with modern techniques of planning in towns.'[27] Munby had considered how the system of rent control might be reformed, whether returning to free market principles, patching the existing system, or local authority acquisition of low-rented housing. He saw the latter option as the most rational, arguing that whilst it was 'not recommended as a panacea', it would remove the slum landlord who was 'by ignorance as much as deliberate exploitation, merely a rentier who battens on the bad conditions of the poor.'[28] Munby followed his pamphlet in a 1953 letter to the Labour newspaper *Forward*, suggesting that the principal concern of the party should be that landlords were denied unreasonably large profits.[29] This belief in the 'character' of the slum landlord as an antiquated, grasping figure was further reinforced by Tory proposals to allow controlled rents to rise should the landlord carry out repairs, which eventually manifested as the 1954 Housing Rent and Repairs Act.[30] The act additionally contained subsidies for slum clearance. A December 1953 article in *Labour's Northern Voice* discussing the White Paper for the 1954 Act argued that there was a danger of '…rent increases following repairs staying on for ever and never another tap done to the house.'[31] The author went on to assert that Labour should aim to take over the properties, but only with a view to re-housing the tenants as soon as possible and protecting

[25] Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman', 848.
[26] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 38.
[27] LHA, LP/362.52, D.L. Munby, *The Rent Problem* (1952), 15.
[28] Ibid., 20.
[29] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Forward* (N.D., 1953), 4.
[30] *Housing Repairs and Rent Act 1954*, accessed online 11 January 2014 at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/2-3/53/section/51.
[31] Working Class Movement Library (hereafter WCML), Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (December 1953), 1.

them from 'Tory benevolence.'[32] In late 1953, Labour's policy statement *Challenge to Britain*, had stated that local authorities should 'gradually' take over rent-controlled properties, as it was 'idle' to expect landlords to improve their houses.[33] The Labour-run Birmingham City Council had actually already done so earlier in 1953 – moving to take over and begin to improve some 30,000 slum houses.[34] Indeed, in a *Labour's Northern Voice* article, a councillor from one of the slum areas asserted that 'something had to be done' while the slum tenants awaited future rehousing, owing to the 'appalling conditions' of the houses.[35] Conversely, in a recent interview, Roy Hattersley – a Sheffield City Councillor in the late 1950s and then MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook from 1964 – dismissed the policy as 'madness', as it made the city council a 'slum landlord.'[36] If the party had been ambiguous about the place of landlords previously, they were now far less so – whilst the people awaited the modern, urban future, it should not be under rentier capitalism.

The move to full 'municipalisation' came at the 1954 annual conference, where Bevan backed a CLP motion on the subject, claiming that '…private ownership of rental property…results in a progressive deterioration of an invaluable part of the social equipment.'[37] Labour saw the 1954 Housing Act as deliberately exploitative. In a Commons debate that year, the Labour MP James MacColl claimed that the 'vague' standards of repair of the act enabled a landlord to simply whitewash the walls of the property in question and hike up the rent, asserting that 'the Bill is a cynical attempt to break down the Rent Acts and to put the tenant at the mercy of the landlord.'[38] An unusually overlooked figure in housing discourse, MacColl was a prolific Labour contributor to housing and local government debates, having previously been Mayor of Paddington and later serving as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Local Government between 1964-9. In a 1954 pamphlet, MacColl stated his support for local authority takeover on the basis that houses were 'part of the nation's capital', remarking that '…landlords and tenants come and go but the

[32] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (December 1953), 1.
[33] LHA, LP/GS/1, Labour Party, *Challenge to Britain* (1953), 28.
[34] Anthony Sutcliffe and Roger Smith, *History of Birmingham, Volume III: Birmingham 1939-1970* (London, 1974), 230.
[35] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (June 1953), 3.
[36] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords (3 July 2013).
[37] *Report of 53rd Annual Conference of the Labour Party* (hereafter *LPCR*) (1954), 109-111.
[38] *Hansard*, (Commons), 526, (13 April 1954), 976-1104, accessed online 14 June 2016 at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1954/apr/13/housing-repairs-and-rents-bill#S5CV0526P0_19540413_HOC_458.

home goes on for several generations.'[39] However, he was cautiously critical of a state monopoly in housing, noting that 'it is going to be hard to get away from the all-seeing eye.'[40] This wariness about the consequences of effectively collapsing the housing market from three tenures to two – public housing and owner-occupied – would be a continued element of Labour deliberation. Nevertheless, the prospect of bringing the vast majority of housing under public control – around six million houses were rent-controlled of a total fifteen million households, with almost three million of the remainder council houses – offered a significant means of advancing Labour's plans for modern cities.[41]

In a 1955 NEC report, the sociologists Peter Willmott and Michael Young claimed that without municipalisation, the seven million controlled houses that they had identified would be slums in ten or twenty years.[42] Willmott and Young suggested that the re-introduction of large-scale slum clearance through the 1954 Housing Act had heightened this process, with most landlords seeing little point of improving their properties with compulsory purchase looming – as they put it, 'the more slums are cleared, the more slums there are.'[43] The 'social case' for the abolition of the landlord was examined still further in a 1955 pamphlet by the economist David Eversley. In Eversley's view, municipalisation would allow for the comprehensive urban transformation that Labour sought, as well as ending a broken system of renting.[44] On this point Eversley was prescient – rent control was self-evidently not a particularly good system for anyone, though Labour would hardly countenance decontrol without ensuring tenant protection. It was in some senses then a logical step to remove the threat to tenants from landlords by removing landlords from the equation entirely. Willmott and Young asserted that falling values heralded the 'unscrupulous, bucket-shop landlord', supported by 'bucket-room lawyers', characterised by undertaking the minimum amount of repairs possible, as well as supposedly taking large bribes to allow new tenants to take over vacancies.[45] However, Eversley noted that Labour would have to proceed cautiously – there

[39] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 3-4.
[40] Ibid., 24.
[41] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 323.
[42] LHA, LPRD R/491, Social Services Sub-Committee, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Seven Million Bathrooms: Interim Report to Labour Party NEC* (March 1955), 1. It is possible that Young and Willmott arrived at the figure of seven million by counting *all* rented properties.
[43] Ibid, 3.
[44] LHA, LP/362.52, David Eversley, *Rents and Social Policy* (1955), 13.
[45] LHA, Young and Willmott, *Seven Million Bathrooms*, 3-4.

would have to be a slight rise in rents under municipalisation given how low the levels of some rent-controlled properties were, despite Labour's campaigning against these provisions in the 1954 Housing Act.[46] Labour's proposals for municipalisation and an end to the 'bucket-shop landlord' were not sufficient to convince the electorate at the 1955 general election, with the party suffering a further defeat. In spite of this, Labour began to craft a more sophisticated case for an end to private renting.

A party publication in 1956 attacked Conservative claims that amenity improvements could be carried out by private landlords, suggesting that '[Landlords] are not philanthropists, most of them - but business men. They are not going to bother to improve or maintain their properties unless they can see some return on their investment.'[47] Following the 1955 defeat, the NEC had created an ad hoc Housing Study Group, headed by Anthony Greenwood (later Minister of Housing from 1966).[48] The deep distaste that the party felt for landlords was apparent in the discussion of the draft policy statement that the Housing Study Group prepared, in which the question was raised 'is it to be an offence to own a house let to other people?'[49] One might wonder whether the impulse to stifle greed was overriding the realities of planning such a major shake-up of the housing market. Labour clarified their position with the 1956 policy statement *Homes For The Future*, which utilised the discussions of the Housing Study Group. Municipalisation would be a strictly temporary measure, but the party accepted that it would take some time to build replacement homes and that the homes taken over would need improvement. Rather troublingly, municipalisation was presented as a solely local authority project, with the assertion that 'theirs will be the task of planning and operating the largest public ownership project yet undertaken in this country.'[50] Given the different sizes, budgets and, perhaps most significantly, the political make-up of local authorities in the country, the likelihood of a unified policy taking shape seemed rather slim. Nevertheless, *Tribune* welcomed the commitment to public ownership, arguing that it recognised that 'wealth in bricks' was the source of power for the landed class, funding 'the Eton master's mortar board, the

[46] LHA, Eversley, *Rents and Social Policy*, 14-15.
[47] LHA, *Talking Points* (1956).
[48] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 324.
[49] LHA, LPRD Re/54, Housing Study Group, 'Discussion of Synopsis for the Research Project on Housing' (2 Feb 1956).
[50] LHA, LPRD HF/421, Labour Party, *Homes For The Future* (1956), 15.

debutante's bromo-seltzer, and the Archbishop's mitre.'[51] There remained an obvious issue – given the volume of repairs that local authorities would have to undertake, the 'unfit' character of much of the private rented stock would likely remain so for some time. Tony Crosland noted this in his 1956 magnum opus *The Future of Socialism*, remarking that if sub-standard property was taken under state control *en masse* 'we should find a pattern of social inequality in housing which bore no obvious relation to the size or distribution of housing subsidies, but depended solely on physical differences in housing standards.'[52] In effect, Labour were falling into the trap that James MacColl would later warn of, namely that 'the hanging of a landlord for his sins of the past will not mend a leaking roof.'[53] Whilst the public ownership of most rented housing made sense in terms of planning for modern cities, the severe dilapidation of the rented stock meant that nineteenth-century decay would be a feature of the urban environment for an interminable length of time.

The response of the Conservative government to the poor condition of the private rented stock was to seek to remove rent control entirely. In this, they were motivated in part by an ideological ambition to recreate a free market in housing, which they believed would solve the repairs issue, and in part as the Treasury believed that some of the increased profits for landlords would fall to them as income tax.[54] The eventual manifestation of these deliberations was the 1957 Rent Act, which removed control from all unfurnished accommodation rated above £40 in 'block decontrol'; below £40, rent increases were limited to twice the annual gross value of the property in question, though if the tenancy changed the property could be entirely decontrolled.[55] John Davis has referred to the act as a 'maladroit liberalization of the rental market', the provisions of which allowed for a process of 'creeping decontrol' of rent-controlled properties and raising of rents.[56] He remarked that the effects of the 1957 Act on the lower end of the rental market were the most 'socially pernicious', given the incentive for the landlord to move the sitting tenant to make a profit – according to a 1960 survey into the act, where this had occurred tenants faced a 145 per cent

[51] LSE Archives (hereafter LSEA), *Tribune* (29 June 1956), 3. Bromo-seltzer was a brand of anti-acid, used as a hangover cure.
[52] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 144.
[53] LHA, LP/362.5/319, James MacColl, *Plan For Rented Houses* (1957), 1.
[54] Simmonds, 'Raising Rachman', 852.
[55] Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London', 75.
[56] Ibid., 74.

increase.[57] Indeed, a visit by the *Tribune* correspondent Mervyn Jones in early 1957 to the 'irregular rows of brick houses' compromising Lavender Street in Reading found sharp rent increases for tenants, with the Barker family's rent rising from nine shillings to fifteen a week, and an elderly Mr Absolom's 'tiny house' going up in rent by over fifty per cent.[58] Jones suggested that the local landlords were neither little old ladies nor big corporations, but simply people 'in business as landlords.'[59] To Labour, this appeared confirmation of their worst fears – landlords profiting from slum property, with no discernible stick to accompany the carrot of increasing rents.

Labour's determination to municipalise rental housing increased, but the party remained unclear about the form it might take. Hornsey CLP passed a resolution to commit a Labour government to take over all rent controlled housing within twelve months of taking office, with the author of the resolution Lyn Mostyn arguing that '…if need is not to be exploited by greed, housing must be taken out of the realm of profit. But the job must be done completely.'[60] However, when brought to annual conference in September 1957, the resolution was soundly defeated on the basis that it was unrealistic to expect *all* local authorities to take over housing at the same rate.[61] Nonetheless, a March 1957 edition of *Labour Organiser*, the magazine of party election agents, carried an article arguing that the Rent Act had been a good opportunity for 'pointed propaganda' when campaigning in Reading.[62] Perhaps tellingly, the Reading Labour Party had omitted to emphasise the Labour commitment to municipalisation in their leaflets. In spite of this, H.E. Newbold, secretary of Salford and Manchester Trades Council wrote in late 1957 of the 'thousands' of letters from tenants expressing 'shocked indignation' at the Rent Act, who had written to the Labour Party and Trades Council offices requesting the trade unions' Labour Research Department one penny pamphlet on the Rent Act.[63] The pamphlet detailed how the act would affect tenants, and explained how to get a certificate of disrepair to prevent rent increases.[64] Newbold went on to

[57] Ibid., 76.
[58] LSEA, *Tribune* (9 February 1957), 9.
[59] LSEA, *Tribune* (9 February 1957), 9.
[60] LSEA, *Tribune* (9 July 1957), 5.
[61] *LPCR*, (1957), 98-104.
[62] LHA, *Labour Organiser* (March 1957), 58.
[63] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (October 1957), 4.
[64] LHA, Pamphlets, 362.52, Labour Research Department, *Tenant's Guide to the 1957 Rent Act* (1957).

state that the next Labour government would not only repeal the act, but make 'all rented property into an effective social service.'[65] In this vision of an equitable future, there was no place for the private landlord.

Property owners were not slow to recognise the threat that Labour's strident policies posed to them. The ALPO and NFPO formed the Rented Homes Campaign to resist municipalisation, with the assistant editor of the *Economist*, Norman Macrae, as a leading spokesman.[66] Helpfully for Labour, many of the leaders were members of the Rented Homes Campaign and were exactly the sort of big landlords that Labour railed against. For example, the campaign's council included Lord Brocket, a Conservative peer and the chairman of five companies, as well as the construction magnate Sir Richard Costain and the Conservative MP for West Harrow, Albert Braithwaite.[67] Nor was their propaganda especially sophisticated – one leaflet circulated in 1959 claimed that 'if the local council became your landlord, your rent could be raised whenever the council thought fit', ignoring the fact that the 1957 Rent Act had presented a similar threat to tenants.[68] In a similar vein, Harry Dickens – somewhat ironically, the grandson of Charles – argued incongruously in a 1958 pamphlet that the 1957 Rent Act was 'working smoothly' and that a 'council dictatorship' of 'The Official Knows Best' would occur under municipalisation.[69] Admittedly, James MacColl warned in 1957 against a rigid approach by the public landlord, suggesting over-use of 'the chilling refrain, "By Order, The Town Clerk"' would not convince tenants that their new public landlords were better than the old, private one.[70] Rather less credibly for tenants, Dickens asserted that the landlord would 'lose his stake in British land', the meaning of which he claimed could not be understood by 'left-wing socialisers.'[71] This being said, even if private tenants were not inclined to sympathy for landlords in terms of their profits or property, they were not necessarily going to be persuaded that muncipalisation would improve matters. In spite of some perceptive figures, Labour members did not always appear to realise the enormity of

[65] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (October 1957), 4.
[66] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 326.
[67] LSEA, *Tribune* (12 July 1957), 1.
[68] LHA, Local Government Box, Correspondence between Uxbridge CLP and LPRD (7 April 1959).
[69] LSEA, MacColl Papers, MACCOLL/266, Harry Dickens, *Whose Home?* (1958), 7-8.
[70] LHA, MacColl, *Plan For Rented Houses*, 20.
[71] LSEA, Dickens, *Whose Home?*, 22.

municipalisation, whether in terms of the increase of state control or the difficulties of taking over thousands of dilapidated properties.

In a 1958 policy pamphlet, *100 Questions Asked and Answered on Labour's Housing Policy*, Labour asserted that 'the case [for municipalisation] in a nutshell is the failure of the private landlords….the private landlord who owns property in order to make money must be replaced by a public landlord treating housing as a social service.'[72] Weiler has suggested that the fact that such a pamphlet was issued 'indicates the difficulty [Labour] was having in selling its policies', though he draws his criticism for the policy from *The Economist* and *The Times*, hardly the most impartial critics of socialist ideas.[73] Given the magnitude of change to the housing market municipalisation demand, it might be considered that excessive prudence by the Labour leadership was unsurprising and, indeed, municipalisation enacted would have caused serious controversy for years to come.[74] Labour were careful to allow room for manoeuvre, however scant. In a 1958 letter to *The Times*, the party General Secretary, Morgan Phillips, assured readers that municipalisation was a *temporary* measure to repair and improve properties.[75]

Attempts like Phillips's to soften the policy were not entirely accepted across Labour – a 1958 article in *Labour's Northern Voice* by a Stoke-on-Trent councillor complained of 'wobbling' by 'some prominent members of the party.'[76] Indeed, MacColl identified that the very vagueness of when municipalisation might actually occur was a severe weakness of the policy. As he put it, 'the dates might of course be the Greek Kalends but presumably something in the near future is intended.'[77] In part, as the LPRD local government officer admitted in comments to MacColl's draft pamphlet on the issue, it was because in Leeds and elsewhere 'councils are refusing point blank to acquire and patch on the grounds that they do not wish to become slum landlords…it would be physically impossible…to replace these properties within 20 years.'[78] This notwithstanding, if slums were 'the product…of private landlordism' as Labour

[72] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Labour Party, *100 Questions Asked and Answered on Labour's Housing Policy* (1958), 17.
[73] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 327.
[74] Ibid.
[75] LHA, LP/GS/3, Campaign Committee, Draft Letter from Morgan Phillips to *The Times* on Labour Housing Policy (16 Dec 1958).
[76] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (September 1958), 5.
[77] LHA, MacColl, *Plan For Rented Houses*, 7.
[78] LSEA, MacColl Papers, MACCOLL/259, LPRD comments to *Plan for Rented Houses* (July 1957), 4.

asserted, then their very existence was an argument for municipalisation.[79] If they could not be replaced within twenty years, and 'rewarding' landlords through further profit was an unappealing option, then mass improvement was logically the solution most likely to overhaul the slums in the short term.

Labour's defeat at the polls in 1959 made mass municipalisation an impossibility, though councils did continue to acquire large numbers of properties in slum clearance schemes. Was municipalisation in part to blame for the 1959 defeat? Labour's deliberate unwillingness to clarify the cost of the scheme may not have helped matters. The left-wing MP for Reading Ian Mikardo had argued to the Local Government Sub-Committee of the NEC in 1958 that major savings could be made if the owners of municipalised properties were given an annual payment or council stocks rather than a lump sum, making as he put it 'nonsense of the talk our having to find millions of pounds in compensation.'[80] Mikardo's suggestion was indeed taken up, and Labour's *100 Questions* pamphlet recommended an annual interest payment to landlords rather than cash payment. However, the document also drew a line between the 'good landlord' and the 'bad landlord', noting that the latter 'who has neglected repairs in order to get a higher net income will get a lower income after municipalisation than he gets now.'[81] As Labour's rhetoric had classified the majority of landlords of rent-controlled properties as belonging to the latter category, it would perhaps have been more realistic to advise that the costs for the scheme would be relatively limited. Mikardo had also noted that a rent rise would be inevitable to cover improvement works to low-standard housing.[82] Given previous rhetoric, it is difficult to see how Labour might have reconciled raising rents on controlled tenancies – and this was precisely the claim made by their adversaries in the Rented Homes Campaign.[83] Labour were vehemently opposed to private landlords, but unwilling to contemplate the enormity of municipalisation.

In a November 1960 edition of *Labour's Northern Voice*, the Salford councillor Eddie Hough claimed that the 'creeping decontrol' of private

[79] LHA, Labour Party, *100 Questions*, 16.
[80] LHA, LPRD Re/272, Local Government Sub-Committee, 'Note by Ian Mikardo MP on cost of municipalising houses' (January 1958).
[81] LHA, Labour Party, *100 Questions*, 17.
[82] LHA, LPRD, 'Note by Ian Mikardo MP'.
[83] LHA, Correspondence between Uxbridge CLP and LPRD.

tenancies was forcing up weekly rents by as much as a pound.[84] Worse, repairs were being neglected and Hough went on to note with some horror '…workers are comparing excessive rents, as against less excessive payments for purchasing houses…'[85] Hough argued that this was part of the wider Conservative ploy to create a 'property-owning democracy.' Whilst the place of owner-occupation in Labour thought will be discussed in the following section, it is clear that Labour viewed with dismay the prospect of the Tories creating new voters from deficient housing policies. Salford City Labour Party called for greater unity between private and council tenants in 1961, arguing that both were 'subsidising the enhanced profits of the landlord and the moneylender.'[86] Council tenants were experiencing rent rises due to the increase in interest rates nationally, as well as central government pressure for councils to set 'fair rents.' In drawing together the council tenant and the private tenant, Salford Labour psychologically made all tenancies the responsibility of state. Nonetheless, the idea that all rented property would be part of the welfare state seemed to be losing favour within Labour. In a 1962 NEC paper, outright takeover of private rented homes was dismissed and the aim of policy was shifted to encouraging private landlords to make improvements to their properties.[87] This was in part a recognition of appalling slum conditions across Britain, with a sluggish pace of slum clearance under the Conservatives and some 600,000 slums still standing in 1961.[88] The NEC paper retained the possibility of temporary municipalisation, asking 'why should incompetent private landlords be left to benefit from higher rents.'[89] In spite of this, municipalisation was officially dropped as Labour policy at the 1962 party conference.[90] However, this was not quite the end of the matter. The problem, as Labour perceived it, of greedy landlords and crumbling rented properties remained. How, then, to solve it?

The publication of the 1963 pamphlet *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* marked a change of pace. Labour asserted that four to five million rented houses were in need of improvement – with only 25,000 being improved by

[84] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (November 1960), 3.
[85] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (November 1960), 3.
[86] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (March 1961), 7.
[87] LHA, LPRD Rd/297, Local Government Sub-Committee 'Municipalisation: defining our new approach' (July 1962).
[88] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 39.
[89] LHA, Local Government Sub-Committee, 'Municipalisation'.
[90] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 334.

landlords annually, it was suggested that 'private landlords will take over a century to provide all their houses with baths if the job is left to them.'[91] Indeed, official figures for the period 1960-4 indicated that only a fifth of rent controlled properties and a quarter of uncontrolled rented homes had a sink, bath, hot water to a bath or sink, satisfactory conditions for storing food and an inside toilet.[92] In spite of this, *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* adopted a hesitant tone on whether councils should take over houses in the event of improvements not being made, arguing that 'it would not be practicable…to insist that *every* old house must satisfy *all* the requirements of the new standard. There will be cases, for example, when a tenant objects to turning a bedroom which cannot be spared into a bathroom.'[93] This seemed an impractical solution – Labour councils would be unlikely to accept any diminution of standards, and those who did would be left with a stock of private rental housing in need of improvement.

During the summer of 1963, the existing scandal of the 'Profumo Affair' grew to encompass the slum landlord Peter Rachman, who had dealings with some of the figures in the case. Though Rachman had in fact died in November 1962, his activities in using intimidation to force a change in tenancy – and thereby decontrol – was demonised by the press, and 'Rachmanism' was used to encompass all unsavoury landlord practices.[94] 'Anti-social behaviour by disreputable owners of property should be condemned in the gravest terms', stated the September 1963 editorial of *Labour Woman*, but registration of landlords was recommended rather than local authority takeover.[95] 'Rachmanism' made it clear that 1957 decontrol had gone too far, but the sheer scale of the problem in rented housing made municipalisation unviable. A few voices were to be found in favour of a harder line. Renee Short, the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Wolverhampton North-East (and MP from 1964), argued in *Tribune* that enforced improvement was a 'poor substitute' for municipalisation, stating that it was as much a part of 'a really comprehensive housing policy as the public ownership of land.'[96] In a similar vein, the local Labour paper the *Baron's Court Citizen* claimed in June 1963 that the 1957 Rent Act had condemned 'hundreds of thousands of tenants to

[91] LHA, LP/362.52/319, Labour Party, *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* (1963), 5.
[92] Myra Woolf, *The Housing Survey 1964 in England and Wales* (London, 1967), 78.
[93] LHA, Labour Party, *Labour's Plan for Old Houses*, 7.
[94] Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London', 1-2.
[95] LHA, *Labour Woman* (September 1963), 3.
[96] LSEA, *Tribune* (6 September 1963), 5.

impoverishment by rapacious landlords.'[97] Though Labour were gifted an enormous piece of political capital by the Rachman scandal, they appeared less sure of their attitude towards private landlords. Were they now an acceptable part of the modern housing market – or yet a symbol of Victorian capitalism which had to be tolerated in the interim?

In February 1963, Mrs R Chambers, a private landlord owning a 'compact block' of forty-nine 'superior artisan dwellings' wrote to Harold Wilson complaining about the high cost of improvement works that had been demanded by her local Labour council without prior payment.[98] Surprisingly, given who she was addressing, Chambers claimed that she had a link to two Conservative MPs 'ready, if necessary, to ask a question in the House on my behalf', but asked 'how many private landlords have these advantages?'[99] Chambers did not appear to be an especially typical landlord, though she professed to have a sort of *noblesse oblige*, claiming she had forsaken a high profit from selling her property to 'protect my decent loyal tenants.'[100] Although this case appeared to confirm Labour suspicions of rent-seeking recalcitrance, the LPRD Local Government officer responded by criticising the council in question for not dealing with the matter sooner, and making it clear that councils ought to pay the landlord by instalment for improvements done.[101] This sympathetic attitude demonstrates the change in Labour sentiment, from one of outright opposition to the landlord as a symbol of anachronism, to grudging encouragement. Indeed, whilst Labour had pledged to crack down on 'Rachmanite' practices prior to taking office in 1964, they instead used their entry to government to impose a 'compromise between control and freedom', in the form of the 1965 Rent Act.[102] Devised by Dick Crossman and his advisers, the act created an independent cadre of 'rent officers', empowered to assess property standards and to set 'fair rents' appropriate to the value of the property as a whole as a means of adjudicating between landlord and tenant. Moreover,

[97] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Baron's Court Citizen* (June 1963), 7.
[98] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter from Mrs R Chambers to Harold Wilson (23 February 1963).
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter from Local Government Officer to Mrs R Chambers (11 March 1963).
[102] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 92.

it enabled a system of what Malpass has described as 'moderated market rents', by allowing increases to 'fair rents' to be phased in subject to review.[103]

Some indication of this strain of Labour thinking was present in a March 1965 *Socialist Commentary* article by Ivor Richard, MP for Baron's Court, in which he argued that despite the Labour usage of the slogan 'Repeal the Rent Act' (that he himself had used, as shown in this section by the *Baron's Court Citizen*) few parliamentary candidates '…really assumed that it meant a straightforward simple repeal of the 1957 Rent Act.'[104] Whether or not this was so, Richard went on to suggest that the new system should be based on 'the freedom of landlord and tenant to fix their own terms', adding only that tenants in low-rated accommodation should have security of tenure.[105] This was quite a departure from past Labour rhetoric. Rather than viewing the tenant as the victim of exploitation, and the morass of rent controls best overcome by fully incorporating private renting into the public system, Richard placed the private rented sector as primarily outside the business of government. This could only be so if the low-income tenants who rented privately were able to afford their rent and were living in reasonable conditions – events would prove otherwise.

By 1968, cracks were appearing. Frank Allaun, the left-wing Labour MP for Salford East, wrote to the NEC in September 1968 claiming that under the provisions of the White Paper *Old Houses into New Homes*, tenancies could be removed from any sort of control if a bath, hot water and inside toilet were installed, even if the tenant had installed such things himself.[106] Allaun went on to claim that this was already the situation in London, Birmingham and Southampton, where 'fair rents' were a tripling of previous rents.[107] He was responded to by Anthony Greenwood – now Minister for Housing and Local Government – who suggested that 'the keynote of the whole exercise is persuasion'[108] Greenwood argued that rent increases were the only means of encouraging landlords to improve the housing stock – ironically enough, this was one of the justifications for decontrol under the 1957 Rent Act.[109] Allaun

[103] Ibid., 93.
[104] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1965), 11. Richard would later become a European Commissioner, and has sat as a Labour peer since 1989.
[105] Ibid., 13.
[106] LHA, LPRD Re/349, Home Policy Sub-Committee, Frank Allaun MP, '*Old Houses into New Homes*: Rent Proposals' (September 1968).
[107] Ibid.
[108] LHA, LPRD Re/352, Home Policy Sub-Committee, Anthony Greenwood MP, '*Old Houses into New Homes*: Rent Proposals' (September 1968).
[109] Ibid.

was not alone in his belief that the 1965 Rent Act had not been a great success. One December 1968 *Socialist Commentary* article asserted that the act had created a 'hotch-potch of *ad hoc* rules', failing most glaringly to ensure that rented property was maintained and improved. The author of the piece went on to recommend 'public control', through a system of compulsory registration for private landlords – in effect, a state managed private market.[110] Objectively, this would appear to have solved the issue of 'bad landlords', although what the piece did not recognise was that this may still have required selective municipalisation, where landlords were found to be unfit for a housing register. Indeed, in a 1967 LPRD review of housing policies the point had been conceded: 'it may be that…municipalisation is the answer at least in certain cases.'[111] Even Greenwood inadvertently acknowledged issues with the post-1965 system in an April 1969 *Labour Woman* piece, noting that the 'machinery' of fair rents existed, but 'not enough tenants have taken advantage of it.'[112] It might be considered that tenants should not have been solely responsible for gaining a fair rent. In this regard, Labour's old conviction that public oversight was integral to ending exploitation and squalor in the rented sector was seemingly validated.

Those who continued to believe that public housing was a more equitable source of renting reaffirmed these beliefs. James MacColl, now Greenwood's Parliamentary Private Secretary, had argued in an NEC review in January 1969 that 'the principal source of rented accommodation should be a public authority.'[113] It should be noted that it is probable Greenwood thought similarly – the issue was that Labour seemed incapable of defining the place of the private landlord. If Labour's intention for a modern, socialist housing system was to end the 'wealth in bricks' of outdated *rentier* capitalism, then the landlord had to be progressively abolished rather than precariously maintained.

Speaking in a recent interview, Roy Hattersley mused

> private landlordism is an anachronism. It depends what sort of landlord, but the sort of houses in which my old constituents lived, they could not be

[110] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (December 1968), 26-28.
[111] LHA, LPRD Re/124, 'Housing Policies: A Review' (April 1967).
[112] LHA, *Labour Woman* (April 1969), 64.
[113] LHA, LPRD Re/399, Housing Policy Study Group, James MacColl MP, 'A Rent Policy' (January 1969).

> run satisfactorily by private landlords. They couldn't maintain adequate levels [of quality] while at the same time making some money. I'm an old-fashioned moderate in the Labour Party, but I think there's some things that ought to be nationalised and housing is one of them.[114]

If the failure to municipalise when in government was in part reflective of the difficulty of implementation, it was also indicative of a lack of clarity by those within Labour regarding whether the private landlord had a role in their vision of the future. Labour had contributed to running down private renting as a form of tenure, but was both unwilling and unable to remove it entirely. In some ways, this appears surprising, given how the deficiencies of rent decontrol seemed to confirm many of Labour's critiques of landlordism. However, the solution Labour eventually introduced – the quasi-voluntary 'fair rents' system – was, in effect, a means of patching up the edifice whilst doing little about the foundations. The temporal restrictions of Labour's attempt to transform the urban environment offer one explanation – the modern, socialist urban utopia that those within Labour sought would not happen immediately. In this light, private rented housing would have to remain standing in the interim period, whether slums or close enough. By the close of the 1960s, a large part of the private rented sector was no different to how it had been in 1957, and in some cases worse. The remoteness of the modern future was part of the reason why, but Labour's unwillingness to find a clear place for the landlord in the 'tenurial pattern' was still more damaging.

Castles for All: Labour and owner-occupation

Writing on Labour housing policy in a 1956 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, David Eversley commented sardonically that 'there is secret applause every time a man takes himself off the register and buys his own solution to the problem.'[115] Eversley claimed that 'the problems of the owner-occupier are receiving as much attention as those of the homeless', condemning this willingness to acquiesce to the desires of home owners as undermining the

[114] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[115] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1956), 16.

concept of 'housing as a social service.'[116] Though the 'property-owning democracy' is a familiar slogan to historians of post-war Britain, it is near-unanimously associated with Conservative thinking, and as a consequence so too is owner-occupation.[117] The nature of Labour's relationship with owner-occupiers and indeed the wider politics of the 'property-owning democracy' in the period 1945-70 is a subject largely neglected by historical scholarship. As has been mentioned in the Introduction, it may have been the case that public housing featured so prominently in Labour's vision of modernity that any nuance in party approaches to property ownership has been obscured. Ben Jackson has demonstrated that the revisionist wing of Labour in particular were far more interested in owner-occupation than might have been imagined.[118] Far from lambasting the 'property-owning democracy' as a Tory fiction, revisionists tried to move Labour towards ending a 'false dichotomy' of Conservative exaltation of private property and Labour attempts to socialise it.[119] How, then, did owner-occupation fit into a modern, socialist housing market? And why has Labour interest in property ownership become subsumed under a narrative of the council house above all else?

Private home ownership had exploded in size as a tenure in the inter-war period. This was in marked contrast to the situation prior to 1914: as Malpass has recounted, owner-occupation may have been as low as ten per cent of overall housing before the First World War, but the majority of the four million homes constructed between the wars were sold to private owners.[120] By 1939, George Orwell was able to write of the 'long, long rows of little semi-detached houses…as much alike as council houses and generally uglier', that symbolised the pre-eminence of home ownership in thirties Britain.[121] Although Noel Skelton, the Conservative MP for Perth, had coined the term 'property-owning democracy' in 1923, it was not until after the Second World War that the Conservatives began to seriously explore a concept of owner-occupation to the exclusion of all other tenures.[122] Following their victory in the 1951 general election, Conservative housing policy focused on building homes for sale,

[116] Ibid., 16-17.
[117] See Weiler, 'Conservative's Search for a Middle Way in Housing' and Davies, ''Right to Buy''.
[118] Jackson, 'Revisionism Reconsidered'; Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*.
[119]Jackson, 'Revisionism Reconsidered', 423.
[120] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 49.
[121] George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (London, 1990) first published 1939, 9.
[122] Davies, ''Right to Buy'', 424.

though the promise of 300,000 houses per annum meant that not all could realistically be destined for owner-occupation.[123] Private enterprise therefore only accounted for thirty per cent of all completions before 1954 – as Davis has remarked, 'ideological corners would have to be cut' if the Conservatives were to reach their target.[124] The Tory dream of a 'property-owning democracy' was far from a reality in the early 1950s, even if owner-occupation was gradually increasing.

In marked contrast to Conservative sentiments, Labour policy after 1945 had emphasised the provision of rented housing, identifying an over-focus on private ownership in the inter-war period. In this they were supported by the findings of the 1944 Pole committee, which had investigated private enterprise house-building during the war and concluded that more rented housing was needed.[125] Whilst Nye Bevan has been charged by historians such as John Campbell as being opposed to home ownership over the period of the Attlee government, as evidenced by the fact that he ensured far more council houses were built than houses for sale, Francis has noted that Bevan was concerned simply by 'provision on the basis of need.'[126] In this regard, he was not against home ownership per se, but simply against it to the exclusion of rented housing. The problem with the inter-war period, as Labour actors saw it, was that 'most new houses…were not being occupied on the basis of need, but money.'[127] In the Labour view, the issue was that there had been an absence of rented homes at an appropriate price for those on a lower income. This was not simply their view – the anarchist George Woodcock claimed that 'only the man who could put down £50 or £100 in ready cash and looked like he were holding down a safe and respectable job was a suitable candidate for one of these jerry-built villas.'[128] Those within Labour exhibited a certain disdain for the ability of private enterprise to serve the needs of the working classes – Birmingham Labour Party had suggested in 1943 that 'the average working man cannot afford to buy his own house and rear and educate a family at the same time.'[129]

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[123] Weiler, 'Conservatives' Search for a Middle Way in Housing', 362.
[124] Davis, 'Macmillan's martyr', 140.
[125] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State* (2005), 51.
[126] Campbell, *Nye Bevan*; Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 120-123.
[127] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 8.
[128] LHA, LP/362.5/318, George Woodcock, *Homes or Hovels: The Housing Problem and Its Solution* (1944), 6. Woodcock was the editor of the political periodical *Now* and a contemporary of George Orwell.
[129] LHA, LP/362.5/318, Birmingham Borough Labour Party, *Homes For the People! Labour's Policy for Birmingham's Need* (Birmingham, 1943), 17.

However, Jon Lawrence has convincingly argued that this was something of an illusion – working-class home owners made up a substantial part of the inter-war boom.[130] Although this may have been the case, Labour's modern plans rested on the theme that any housing solution would be one planned and delivered by the local authorities, as 'they, and they alone, are able to assess the relative housing needs of different families.'[131] In the years 1945-51, Labour's assessment of 'relative housing needs' found only a narrow space for private ownership.

Things slowly began to change in the 1950s. At the general election in 1951, Labour had proposed giving leaseholders of private houses the option of buying the freehold of their home, which they reasserted in the 1953 policy statement *Challenge to Britain*.[132] Whilst anxious that Labour did not indulge in 'me-too-ism' with the Tories over owner-occupation, James MacColl observed in 1954 that 'there is no fundamental objection to a man owning his own house any more than to owning his own trousers.'[133] Most audaciously of all, the Labour MP for Oldham West, Leslie Hale, suggested in a January 1953 edition of *Labour's Northern Voice* that tenants of rent-controlled properties should be allowed to buy their home as a freehold rather than have them municipalised, arguing that wider home ownership would 'add strength to our democratic values.'[134] Hale proposed that the tenants in question could acquire their homes with 'no question of mortgages or deposits', remarking that 'the average person does not feel secure so long as he remains a tenant.'[135] Had Labour actually pursued this idea, it is not impossible to envisage it being relatively popular, but Hale's sentiments were certainly not conventional Labour wisdom. This being said, in comments to a draft of MacColl's 1957 pamphlet *Plan for Rented Houses*, the LPRD local government officer suggested that landlords might simply sell slum properties to tenants at low cost if faced by municipalisation, and 'many tenants will undoubtedly take advantage of such offers, not wishing to become council tenants.'[136] In this light, the local government officer went on to note that 'there is a strong argument for

[130] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life', 276.
[131] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 19.
[132] LHA, Labour Party, *Challenge to Britain*, 28.
[133] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 13.
[134] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (January 1953), 8.
[135] Ibid., 8.
[136] LSEA, LPRD comments to *Plan for Rented Houses*, 3.

encouraging tenants to purchase', not least because it might reduce the municipalised stock by a million properties.[137] Perhaps most surprisingly, the left-wing Labour grouping Victory For Socialism (VFS) made the same suggestion in 1958, arguing for one hundred per cent mortgages for municipalised tenants.[138] This was all the more extraordinary, given that Harry Dickens had claimed that municipalisation was a cover to ending owner-occupation and preventing tenants from escaping 'the regimentation of the Red Heaven.'[139] If Labour actors appeared unwilling to contemplate owner-occupation in any active sense at this point, it is clear that there was no practical contradiction between individual property ownership and Labour's modern, socialist vision.

Where Labour were far more cautious was on the question of individual financing of property ownership. MacColl warned in 1954 that if mortgage repayments outstripped the cost of repairs, owner-occupied property became a 'wasting asset' – he believed that a relatively high wage of £12 a week was required to avoid this.[140] 'Wasting assets' were also the concern of Munby, who argued in 1957 that the 'small man' should hold liquid assets such as stocks and shares, as 'if one's savings are tied up in a house, they cannot easily be mobilised in a crisis.'[141] Slums could therefore develop in entirely owner-occupied areas, as became the case in parts of inter-war Bristol.[142] In his study of 1960s Sunderland, the sociologist Norman Dennis focused on an area of owner-occupied single-storey cottages. In spite of his claim that the cottages were not 'structural slums', it is clear from his findings that many cottage inhabitants lived in poor conditions.[143] Building societies – responsible for much of the inter-war housing boom – were generally seen as the villains of the piece, running the 'cleverest racket of modern times' in the view of Orwell.[144] In 1955, David Eversley alluded to this in his description of the 'grand-parental system of finance', with parents tied in mortgage repayments for private homes in the

[137] Ibid., 3.
[138] LHA, LP/362.5/318, Victory for Socialism, *A Roof Over Your Head? Socialist policy for housing and rents* (1958), 5.
[139] LSEA, Dickens, *Whose Home*, 17.
[140] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 14.
[141] LHA, LP/362.5/318, D.L. Munby, *Home Ownership* (1957), 23.
[142] Herbert Tout, *The Standard of Living in Bristol: A Preliminary Report of the Work of the University of Bristol Social Survey* (Bristol, 1938), 29.
[143] Dennis, *People and Planning*, 145-8.
[144] Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, 11.

hope that they might be able to help their children with deposits.[145] Munby also referred to the 'racket', arguing that building societies were concerned simply with making a profit, despite the fact that 'the propaganda of politicians has apparently convinced these admirable money-lenders that they perform a social service.'[146] In spite of the abject inefficiency of the owner-occupied sector, it clearly provided a rival housing service, if not exactly a social one.

Labour's solution was to cut out the 'admirable money-lenders' where possible – one hundred per cent mortgages were proposed in *Homes For The Future*, and the party stated that '[our policies] will provide the incentive for a vast extension of owner-occupation.'[147] However, Labour made it clear in a 1958 publication that government-assisted loans would be subject to strict conditions – the mortgager was required to install modern amenities in the house in question, contribute to a repairs fund, and to give the local authority the first opportunity of buying the house at a price fixed by the district valuer.[148] This was owner-occupation articulated in the terms of the Labour movement – controls preventing the individual from benefiting at the expense of the collective community. In a similar vein, MacColl had suggested that Labour should only offer leaseholds so the state remained in control of the land supply. He felt that this was an acceptable price for an efficient housing market, remarking 'there is ultimately no room left for the Englishman's sovereignty over his castle.'[149] Victory For Socialism proposed that housing sales become a local authority practice – local authority surveyors would be used instead of private individuals, and the group recommended the abolition of stamp duty to encourage house buying.[150] Similarly, in a 1956 *Tribune* piece, Albert Evans, MP for Islington South-West, had approvingly observed the West German use of tax deductions to encourage owner-occupation.[151] Ironically, VFS was viewed as a hard-left vehicle, and the NEC acted to limit its ability to organise – but its housing policies were not so distant from Labour thought in the period.[152] The declaration of VFS that 'we seek in short only two tenures of residential

[145] LHA, Eversley, *Rents and Social Policy*, 16.
[146] LHA, Munby, *Home Ownership*, 23
[147] LHA, Labour Party, *Homes For The Future*, 45.
[148] LHA, Labour Party, *100 Questions*, 12-13.
[149] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 17.
[150] LHA, Victory for Socialism, *Roof Over Your Head*, 8-9.
[151] LSEA, *Tribune* (17 February 1956), 4.
[152] Eric Shaw, *Discipline and discord in the Labour Party: The politics of managerial control in the Labour Party, 1951-87* (Manchester, 1988), 53-5.

land-holding: the freehold of the owner-occupier, and the Council tenancy' was essentially the same sentiment as expressed in *Homes For The Future*.[153]

Other left-wingers remained suspicious of home ownership. In a 1955 *Tribune* piece, Ian Mikardo sardonically defined the 'property-owning democracy' as a system 'under which a few people own property and the rest democratically decide that the same few shall go on owning it.'[154] Writing in to *Tribune* in 1956 on the subject of 'housing as a social service', Mr M. Wales of South Shields argued that owner-occupiers were not playing their part in the financing of the housing system due to low rates and that many 'bought their homes before the war when property was cheap.'[155] It may have been that some Labour activists in the 1950s regarded property ownership as little more than a distraction to the task of building public housing. This was particularly so when owner-occupiers were often the source of disquiet about paying rates – the key means of financing the modern, socialist project when Labour were out of government.

There was a meeting point between the two seemingly conflicted tenures of owner-occupation and public housing – namely, the sale of council houses to sitting tenants. Though this was largely anathema to Labour principles, and with the 'Right to Buy' scheme of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s has since been solely associated with Tory ideology, Labour did allow for some level of council house sale by local authorities at points throughout the post-war period. Council house sales had been permitted through the 1936 Housing Act, with ministerial consent required. Under the Attlee government, the minister responsible was Aneurin Bevan, who unsurprisingly refused to countenance sales on the grounds that it would intensify the existing crisis in rented accommodation.[156] From 1951-64, despite activist pressure, the Conservative government showed little inclination to increase owner-occupation through the sale of council housing.[157] It was, however, still possible for Labour to attack 'rushed' Tory plans to sell off council houses as early as December 1951, although the party suggested it was due to a tight-fisted desire to avoid paying out housing subsidies rather than an intellectual project of home ownership.[158]

[153] LHA, Victory for Socialism, *Roof Over Your Head*, 8-9.
[154] LSEA, *Tribune* (3 July 1955), 5.
[155] LSEA, *Tribune* (17 February 1956), 10.
[156] Davies, ''Right to Buy'', 425.
[157] Ibid., 429.
[158] LHA, *Talking Points* (15 December 1951), 118.

A similar claim of penny-pinching was used in a 1965 pamphlet, which drew attention to an 'amazing demonstration of wilful prejudice' against an attempt in 1964 by the Labour-controlled Portland council in Dorset to build seventy houses for sale.[159] Equally, there were some instances of active 'privatisation' of council estates. Ben Jones has described the systematic selling off of council houses in Brighton by the Conservative council from 1952, though sales were not significant until 1959, and a Conservative policy of sales was retained in Bristol when the council was won back by Labour in 1963.[160] Labour activists were even sometimes wary of limited sales by councils. In a recent interview, the former West Ham councillor Keith Hasler suggested that a policy of selling council houses to 'key workers' was resented by some councillors.[161]

Nonetheless, council house sales were not a major topic of discussion until Labour had returned to government in 1964. Following local election gains in 1966, a number of Tory councils engaged in what Aled Davies has described as 'sales activism', an attempt to promote council house sales through simultaneous rent increases and discounts for buyers.[162] Anthony Greenwood, the Minister for Housing, took serious issue with these brazen tactics, backing a motion at annual conference in 1967 to ban Conservative councils from selling houses. He declared that 'I did not become Minister of Housing to preside over the squandering of public assets and this is what the sale of council houses means.'[163] In a further attack piece Labour referred to the Tory proposal as a 'monstrous electioneering gimmick', and that sales put pressure on waiting lists and reduced the numbers of three-bedroom houses available.[164] Similarly, *Labour's Northern Voice* put 'A Total Ban on All Council House Sales' at the top of their December 1969 proposals to make 'housing a social service.'[165] The difference was made clear in a 1967 Birmingham Labour Party local elections flyer attacking the 'sales activism' of the Conservative-controlled council, in which the party asserted that 'Labour helps home ownership – but not at the expense of the 38,000 still waiting to rent.'[166] Though Greenwood was able to block council house sales, the Conservative commitment to further sales

[159] LHA, LP/362.5/318, Labour Party, *Facts on Housing, Labour Party* (March 1965), 6.
[160] Jones, 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization', 531.
[161] Interview with Keith Hasler, East Ham (16 June 2014).
[162] Davies, ''Right to Buy'', 429.
[163] *LPCR* (1967), 152.
[164] LHA, *Talking Points* (1967), 8.
[165] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (December 1969), 3.
[166] BCA, 329.94249, Birmingham Borough Labour Party, 'The Housing Diary' (1967).

weakened Labour considerably amongst those tenants keen to buy by the early 1970s.[167] Whilst the ease by which the Tories could outflank Labour on council house sales exposed a rigidity in Labour's view of the housing sector, 'sales activism' was also evidence of ideological obstinacy. Frank Allaun noted in a 1968 *Tribune* piece that 'local authorities will receive far less from the sale of council houses than they will have to spend on building new ones.'[168] There was little logic in this, unless the party in question was committed to creating owner-occupiers by any means necessary. In contrast, the Labour view was that council houses could *sometimes* be sold, but only under the right conditions and sales could be stopped at any moment. In their view of a modern housing market, Labour actors saw home ownership as something that should be provided directly, whether by public or private builder, rather than cherry-picked from the public housing stock.

Signposts for the Sixties was emphatic of the growing Labour interest in owner-occupation in the 1960s. Echoing Mikardo, whether consciously or not, the pamphlet claimed that the Conservatives could not deliver a 'property-owning democracy', with the reality being that 'the top one per cent own nearly half the nation's private wealth and property.'[169] Jackson has argued that the 'egalitarian strategy' pursued by those on the revisionist right of Labour was in part aimed at freeing the people from 'economic and political domination of a wealthy minority.'[170] Indeed, Crosland, one of the main architects of this approach argued in 1962 that 'if the property is well distributed, a property-owning democracy is a socialist rather than a conservative ideal.'[171] In spite of these laudable aims, there seemed to be a tacit acceptance within Labour that property ownership and rented tenancies would invariably be unequal. This was particularly so with the introduction of differential rent schemes for public housing, which made renting more expensive for higher earners and will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Writing in 1961, Douglas Houghton, MP for Sowerby, cautioned readers of *Labour Woman* that 'more and more house-hunters are being forced to buy', due to long council house waiting lists and the fact that houses were only being

[167] Davies, ''Right to Buy'', 434.
[168] LSEA, *Tribune* (20 December 1968), 5.
[169] LHA, LP/GS/1, Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties* (1961), 9-10.
[170] Jackson, 'Revisionism Reconsidered', 425.
[171] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 39.

privately built for sale.[172] However, Houghton sounded a different tone to past Labour members on the role of building societies in this – he claimed that 'Building Societies are not grinding money-lenders; they are performing a public service and conduct themselves accordingly.'[173] Whilst building societies may not have been the scoundrels that Munby had claimed them to be, it is unlikely that they were as altruistic as Houghton claimed. In a 1963 *Socialist Commentary* piece, Roy Hattersley went so far to suggest that 'owner-occupation remains in many ways the ideal housing pattern', though he noted that those who could not afford council rents would be unlikely to be able to afford, or be granted, mortgages.[174] The housing academic J.B. Cullingworth argued that this was precisely the case, with families being forced to buy substandard dwellings due to their inability to raise loans. [175] The fact that Labour still intended individuals to pay fully for the costs of housing may have meant that the poorest still lost out. Cullingworth recommended a household subsidy for all who might need it, 'irrespective of the character of their tenure.'[176] To some degree, this was more indicative of Labour's core argument than revisionist propositions – not enough houses were being built to rent affordably, and owner-occupation could be a 'wasting asset'.

The issue was perhaps that Labour had begun to indulge in what MacColl had described as 'me-too-ism' with regards to property ownership. By 1969, the NEC Housing Study Group triumphantly asserted that Labour had increased private sector building over previous Conservative totals by 12.9% between 1965-8.[177] It was true that private sector building was required to meet the enormous target of 500,000 houses per annum that the party had set itself, though total completions fell short of this.[178] Although a 1967 LPRD policy review was able to note that 'most people in the Party now accept that adequate provision for owner-occupation must be included in any future housing plan', some people in the party still seemed concerned that Labour had followed a Conservative lead of acclaiming private ownership.[179] This was particularly so

[172] LHA, *Labour Woman* (October 1961), 4.
[173] Ibid., 6.
[174] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (August 1963), 9.
[175] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (May 1964), 24.
[176] Ibid., 25.
[177] LHA, LPRD Re/448, Housing Policy Study Group 'Housing: Report of the Housing Policy Study Group' (August 1969), 7.
[178] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 183.
[179] LHA, LPRD Re/124, 'Housing Policies - A Review' (April 1967).

in the case of subsidies. In 1969, the MP for Bethnal Green, William Hilton, criticised attempts to introduce higher rents for council tenants without penalties for owner-occupiers, rubbishing the idea that the private owner was 'an independent character satisfying his housing needs without state help or other advantage.'[180] In fact, Hilton argued that 'the average net tax relief for the owner-occupier is around £31 per annum [interest paid to building society]. The average subsidy for council tenants – from Exchequer funds – is £19 per annum.'[181] Daunton has described mortgage tax relief as an implicitly political policy, particularly with the abolition of 'schedule A' taxation of the imputed income of houses by the Conservatives in 1964 – this was a means of making a 'property owning democracy' significantly more attractive from a tax-beneficial perspective.[182]

Labour did little to reduce this disparity whilst in government, and by 1970 found themselves having to defend 'high subsidised' public housing from Conservative attacks. Responding to these charges, Labour asserted that

> nobody would argue that tax relief should be withdrawn from owner-occupiers even though it frequently goes to those on high incomes. However, the Tories have never mentioned this aspect and have confined their attacks of wasted money solely to the council sector.[183]

If the Conservatives were willing to promote property ownership by diminishing public housing, Labour's attempt to create a 'rational' housing sector could only fail. Equally, the Conservative vision seemed more sincere, given the enduring hostility to private property amongst some of the Labour rank and file.

The ideological fault line between Conservative and Labour housing policy became more sharply pronounced as the 1960s drew to a close. Crosland would observe in 1971 that 'there is not and cannot be a free market in housing', his words epitomising the Labour conception of owner-

[180] LHA, LPRD Re/400, 'Comments on Re.369, by W.S. Hilton MP' (January 1969).
[181] Ibid.
[182] Martin Daunton, *Just Taxes: The Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1914-1979* (Cambridge, 2002), 262.
[183] LHA, *Talking Points* (31 July 1970), 5.

occupation.[184] The free market was anathema to Labour's socialist, modern vision – wide disparities in landed wealth had, in the view of Labour actors, created the slums and would do so again. Labour therefore aimed at extending some measure of state control over the market and in their reading of what needed to be done, public housing had to take precedence if Britain's cities were to rise in a modern form. In this regard, if housing was a means of solving the problems of urban deprivation, then uncontrolled, uninhibited owner-occupation did not serve the interests of those Labour saw as being in most need. Hattersley has suggested that during his time on Sheffield City Council, the prevailing Labour view towards owner-occupiers was that 'they're not us.' Of eighty councillors, only ten were home owners, and two were Hattersley and his mother.[185] Labour's focus on the provision of rented housing could often translate into a message of hostility towards owner-occupation. Of course, this could work both ways – a 1950 *Town Crier* piece by a 'middle class' Labour voter and home owner, claimed that their 'Tory friends' wanted a 'property owning democracy' whilst failing to see that the '£5 a week man' could not afford to buy a house, nor pay off a mortgage.[186] Politics in practice was not a case of rational steps. The need to reassert a transformative urban vision made Labour prioritise the public over the private.

Housing as a Social Service: Labour and public housing

More than any other tenure, public housing has been central to narratives of Labour housing policy after 1945. The council house and especially the flat remain an emblematic feature of the built landscape, inviting both contemporary acclaim and critique. Historians have been drawn to a clear Labour preference for greater state intervention in housing, pointing to this variously as a 'civilising mission' of the middle classes, pure expediency in finding a simple post-war solution to house the people, a course of paternalism expertise *and* pragmatism, and, less commonly in the present day, as a working-class triumph.[187] Few, however, have questioned how public housing served broader

[184] LHA, LPRD Rd/208, Housing Finance Working Group, A Crosland 'Towards a Labour Housing Policy' Dec 1971.
[185] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[186] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Town Crier* (4 February 1950), 10.
[187] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*; Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*; Shapely, *Politics of Housing*; Harloe, *The People's Home*.

Labour objectives within the wider urban environment. As with other forms of tenure, Labour's relationship with public housing in the years 1945-70 was complex and shifting – indeed, as labyrinthine as wider ideals of modernity. While Chapter Three will discuss the place of class in the context of housing and the community, this section will examine two particularly indicative, if overlooked, areas of Labour thought in relation to the ideals of modern, radical change. Firstly, it will look into party deliberations over the appropriate level of rent or subsidy for public housing, which fed directly into the wider Labour conception of housing as a social service. Secondly, this section will discuss 'social' alternatives to state provision of housing, the failure of which are revealing of the character of Labour's modernism. If Labour's view of modernity meant in the words of one 1955 publication, '[removing] housing from the field of profiteering and [treating] it as a social service' – then how did the party go about doing this?[188]

Speaking in a Commons debate on housing in July 1946, the Labour MP for Acton, Joseph Sparks, stated that Conservative government between the wars had meant 'a policy of refusal to exercise the housing powers which existed to build houses at decent rents.'[189] Labour's championing of public housing was a refutation of this 'policy of refusal', in the belief that the needs of most people would be best served by subsidised council homes to rent. As Sparks' colleague Tom Braddock, MP for Mitcham, would go on to assert in the same debate, it would be 'the first time in this country's history that the ordinary people who do the work…have been reasonably and properly housed.'[190] Through the provision of public housing, Labour could create their own vision of the future and it was for many activists 'the gateway to health, education, higher domestic standards.'[191] Stephen Brooke has noted that Labour's social policy proposals for 1945 'evinced a sense of vindication', and this was as true of housing as of social insurance.[192] The 1946 Housing (Financial Provisions) Act was instrumental in this, trebling the Exchequer subsidy for local authority

[188] LHA, *Talking Points* (5 March 1955), 32.
[189] *Hansard*, (Commons), 426, (30 July 1946), 787-909, accessed online 14 June 2016 at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1946/jul/30/housing.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Alison Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat: local authorities and multi-storey housing between the wars' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London, 1974), 122-150 at 130.
[192] Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party during the Second World War* (Oxford, 1992), 315.

houses and extending the subsidy period for sixty years.[193] Indeed, throughout the Attlee government, Bevan would argue in favour of the public landlord over the private, as according to Francis he believed that 'private landlords could not be relied upon to keep rents low.'[194] Accordingly, of a total of 1,016,349 dwellings completed in the years 1945-51 some 806,857 were council houses.[195]

Following the Conservative takeover of government in 1951, a rise in the Exchequer subsidy for each new council house in the 1952 Housing Act was matched by a concurrent increase in building licenses to private builders – although the new Minister of Housing, Harold Macmillan, was under no illusions about the need for public house-building to achieve the 300,000 target.[196] From the Labour perspective, the impetus was that council homes to let should continue to be built as a priority, at relatively low rents – at a local level, as long as Labour controlled the council, they had a reasonably free hand in this. Nonetheless, it is apparent that Labour engaged in a continuous process in defining their commitment to public housing. In a 1952 edition of *People's Pictorial*, this differentiation from the Conservatives was spelt out – it was claimed that 'in housing, [the Conservatives] assert that people with money can have a house: those without must get back in the queue.'[197] It was on this basis that Labour policy would be formed – a modern, socialist nation was a fairly housed one.

Rent policy was a central feature of Labour's approach to public housing, although the party remained conflicted throughout the period 1945-70 as to exactly the level that rents should be set at, as well as precisely how any subsidy scheme should operate. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the debates within the party on the question of rents for council homes are highly revealing of the shifting manner in which housing was seen as a means to end urban deprivation. Debates centred on whether tenancies should be reserved for those unable to pay market rents, or whether council homes could be a means of overcoming the private sector, available to all at the point of service like the NHS or education system. The key moment came in the mid-1950s, with a

[193] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 67.
[194] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 119.
[195] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 68.
[196] Ibid., 72-3.
[197] LHA, LP/GS/8, *People's Pictorial*, 2 (1952), 14.

major change in Conservative government policy with the 1956 Housing Subsidies Act, which removed the subsidy for public housing not built for slum clearance tenants as well as removing the obligation for local authorities to contribute to their housing activities through their local rate fund.[198] This effectively meant that more of the costs of public housing would be shifted onto tenants – in direct opposition to Labour's aims through 1945-51. Combined with the move to decontrol of the private rented market with the 1954 Housing Act, this presented a considerable challenge to Labour attempts to provide for their idealised 'ordinary people who do the work.'

Of course, Labour were not unaware of the high costs of providing public housing. Writing in 1950, Peggy Crane, a Kensington councillor and LPRD local government officer, stated that high building costs threatened to jeopardise the effects of existing housing subsidies – unless local authorities dipped further into their rate fund, with the risk of antagonising ratepayers.[199] Crane suggested that Labour councils might have to consider 'differential' rent or rebate schemes, so 'the community is not asked to subsidise those who can afford to pay an economic rent.' However, as she went on to note, the schemes 'raised certain administrative and psychological problems' for the Labour movement, as it reminded many of the hated inter-war means test.[200] It was true that the schemes had first been introduced in the 1936 Housing Act, which had also linked public housing to slum clearance, rather than to 'general needs'.[201] Nonetheless, Crane pointed to Leeds, which operated a differential scheme, and to a rent rebate scheme in the London borough of Lambeth, as a means of maintaining a 'socialist rent policy' – given, she implied, the difficulties of drawing too heavily on rate funds or paying out high Exchequer subsidies indefinitely.[202] Indeed, Crane had presumably been involved herself in gathering a large tranche of LPRD information on differential or rebate schemes, which appeared as a LPRD internal memorandum in February 1950 – and she may even have written the proviso that those councils that did operate schemes did so 'on quite different lines from each other.'[203] Simply put, the

[198] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 87.
[199] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (May 1950), 106. Crane would also be a founding member of Amnesty International in 1961.
[200] Ibid., 106.
[201] Harloe, *The People's Home*, 184.
[202] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (May 1950), 106-7.
[203] LHA, LPRD Rd/345, 'Differential Rents, Pooled Rents, Rent Rebates' (February 1950), 1.

'differential' scheme in Leeds worked on the basis of rent calculated from the full family net weekly earnings, with rent relief applied according to the circumstances of the person(s) in question – an old age pensioner might pay half of a 'normal' net rent for a council home.[204] Conversely, Lambeth's rent rebate worked through the setting of a fully subsidised 'standard' rent, with a possible maximum and minimum rent fixed either side. Tenants were then informed of the maximum rent they could pay, and invited to apply for a rent rebate based on information provided about income. Lambeth council found that of 160 tenants taking part, 113 paid above the standard rent, 3 paid the standard rent, and 44 paid less than the standard rent.[205] Lambeth had noted in their report to the LPRD that they were 'mindful…that housing is a form of a social service, and the fair selection of tenants a serious business.'[206] Whilst it was clear that Lambeth had considered how to keep housing a social service, without putting themselves into financial difficulties, the *principle* of different charges was likely, as Crane had noted, to cause conflict.

Such conflict over differential rents was particularly likely when there existed the possibility of even cheaper rents. A visit by a delegation of trade unionists to the USSR in 1950 reported that the maximum rent was just ten per cent of the highest individual income, including all utility charges. As the writer exclaimed, 'just imagine paying 7.s a week out of a £7 wage for a flat and nothing to pay for rates, electric light, electricity for cooking or central heating!'[207] Though it should be noted that the writer in question was the Communist activist William Wainwright, all of the other trade unionists expressed similar sentiments – and several were Labour councillors. A similarly approving regard for the low Soviet rents was present in the 1952 delegates' report.[208] There were enticing possibilities the other side of the Iron Curtain, too – a June 1954 *Labour Woman* article spoke of 'incredibly low' rents in Vienna, where the average worker spent only five per cent of their income on rent in 1945.[209] Rents had been fixed to cover the cost of maintenance only, with house-building financed primarily from municipal taxes, and whilst the author of

[204] Ibid., 2-3.
[205] Ibid., 10-11.
[206] Ibid., 10.
[207] LHA, LP/380.3, British Workers' Delegation to the USSR, *Russia With Our Own Eyes* (1950), 105.
[208] LHA, LP/380.3, British Workers' Delegation to the USSR, *What We Saw In Russia* (1952), 24.
[209] LHA, *Labour Woman* (June 1954), 129.

the piece seemed sceptical of how well such a scheme would operate in Britain, they conceded that 'it must certainly be popular with the tenants.'[210] It is quite likely that some *Labour Woman* readers would have been similarly persuaded by such fantastically cheap rents. In point of fact, the April 1954 edition of *Labour Woman* had run an article by the Labour agent for Chislehurst – at this point in time a highly marginal constituency – which described how houses completed in 1952 were being rented at almost £1 more a week than houses built two years previously, despite being smaller.[211] This was in part due to the higher cost of building the newer houses, and the policy of the local Conservatives to charge the tenants more to cover costs.[212] Some Labour actors might have seen as this as a good opportunity to introduce a differential or rebate scheme, as indeed James MacColl proposed in 1954, arguing that the greatest 'social advantage' would be gained from using housing subsidies to ensure 'that young families get better housing than they can afford and to keep a roof over the heads of old people.'[213] Others, however, were likely to see low rents as a sacrosanct part of the 'social service.'

Trying to devise a 'national' Labour solution to rent policy in 1955, David Eversley commented that 'emotionally…the pressure is in favour of the general subsidy out of national taxation.'[214] Even with this in mind, Eversley argued that taxation was probably as high as it could go, and given that in his estimation not everyone wanted a council house, he favoured a universal system of rent rebates – his preferred scheme was for 'those with the smallest incomes and greatest responsibilities to rent the best houses'.[215] Similarly, the Labour councillor Arthur Marsh argued in a February 1954 edition of *Socialist Commentary* that as houses were 'durable consumer goods', and more difficult to supply free of charge than healthcare or education, then some form of differential or rebate scheme was required.[216] Interestingly, Marsh believed that the crux of the issue was in the system of local rates, hinting that some form of local taxation based on income would be far more effective.[217] Though Eversley conceded that many Labour members might be 'horrified' by his

[210] Ibid., 129.
[211] LHA, *Labour Woman* (April 1954), 78.
[212] Ibid.
[213] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing* (1954), 19.
[214] LHA, Eversley, *Rents and Social Policy*, 24.
[215] Ibid., 30.
[216] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (February 1954), 52.
[217] Ibid., 52.

proposal, according to his view most would agree that a universal rebate policy would do more to 'help further our social aims' than 'old slogans and nostrums.'[218] One party figure who would certainly have agreed with Eversley on the latter point was Crosland, who argued that Labour should champion 'universal *availability*' of public housing, rather than 'universal *free* availability.' In Crosland's view, linked to a wider revisionist notion of social equality, it was more important that an income test simply determined the question of free *access* to a social service such as housing, rather than determining the *right* to utilise public housing.[219] Peter Baldwin has argued that welfare states are in essence 'broad [communities] of risk', and have been most durable when the middle classes as well as the poor are favoured by 'statutory generosity.'[220] Whilst the positions advocated by Eversley and Crosland still fell within the logic of 'communities of risk', charging higher rents for middle-class or even better off working-class council tenants threatened to undermine the shared 'statutory generosity.' There was some irony, then, in Crosland's praise for the marginalising effect on private services of the 'high qualitative standard' of Swedish social services.[221] This had only been possible by a 'deliberately pro-bourgeois' policy, rather than the more focused attempt on those in need that Crosland and other reforming thinkers called for.[222] In this regard, the reasoning for universal rents was to a degree more lucid than might otherwise have been suspected.

Writing in a June 1955 edition of *Labour's Northern Voice*, Councillor Price Jones offered 'a personal illustration' of why he believed that 'economic rents' for council homes were fair. Jones stated that he was a miner, 'struggling to pay off a mortgage on a not very modern house' whereas his wealthier colliery manager lived 'in a council house in the same town.'[223] 'Can anyone see Socialism in that', asked Jones, going on to suggest that there was a clear difference between a public park or the NHS where all paid and all benefited, and housing subsidies 'where all pay and only a few may benefit.'[224] Responding to Jones the following month, the Manchester councillor Edmund

[218] Eversley, *Rents and Social Policy*, 34.
[219] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 145.
[220] Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875-1975* (Cambridge, 1990), 290-293.
[221] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 143.
[222] Baldwin, *Politics of Social Solidarity*, 112.
[223] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (June 1955), 5.
[224] Ibid., 5.

Dell argued that differential schemes created 'unnecessary bureaucracy' due to their complexity. Instead, he remarked that a 'good Socialist principle' was not that some should benefit less from the common tax pool, but that they should pay more tax – or as he put it, 'differential tax payments but equal benefits.'[225] Curiously, both arguments evoked a modern, socialist vision – but whilst Jones' addressed an immediate attempt by the Treasury to reduce the cost of housing subsidies, Dell's suggested that compromising the principle of a universal housing system in practice would frustrate it philosophically. Similar debates raged across the pages of *Labour Woman* and *Tribune*. When Peggy Crane argued for differential rents in the August 1955 edition of *Labour Woman* in a near-identical reprise of her 1950 *Socialist Commentary* piece, she suggested that housing could only be a social service if Labour enabled 'good houses to come within the reach of all.'[226] A letter-writer in the October 1955 issue reflected that 'identical houses, like identical bedsteads or T.V. sets, should fetch an identical price.'[227] *Tribune*'s acceptance of differential rents in 1956 provoked a storm of letters from its readership, with one reader asserting that 'this may be the intellectual's idea of Socialism, but it isn't mine.'[228] Another suggested that a differential scheme could not be a means of making housing a 'social service', as the burden for rents is placed on the tenant rather than the community as a whole.[229] The editors of *Tribune* – the lead editor at this point being Michael Foot – were unmoved, stating that 'differential schemes will in many places be the fairest way to share the burden and the *only* way to give the poorly paid worker a house.'[230] It is clear that the debate put Labour in a difficult position. If housing was to be the agent of modern change, it had to apply to all – but if economic circumstances were beyond Labour's control, then some measure of adaptation was required.

The conversion from universal to differential or rebate schemes was easier said than done. In January 1961, Watford Borough Council Labour Group contacted the LPRD asking whether there was a party 'yardstick' for an 'economic' rent, as 'there is a difference of opinion between my members as to

[225] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (July 1955), 2. Dell would later become MP for Birkenhead from 1964-74, joining the SDP when it formed.
[226] LHA, *Labour Woman* (August 1955), 127.
[227] LHA, *Labour Woman* (October 1955), 155.
[228] LSEA, *Tribune* (20 February 1956), 9.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.

what constitutes a reasonable rent.'[231] Peggy Crane responded by noting that there was no official policy as to what a 'reasonable rent' was, but where councils had introduced differential schemes, the 'economic rent' was 'between one-sixth and one-seventh of gross income (including wife's earnings if she is working) or one-fifth of income if rents and rates are taken together.'[232] To add a further layer of complication, Crane added that some councils based their rent on 'two and a half times the gross [rateable] value of the property.'[233] Another party member writing to the research department was simply told 'this is essentially a matter for Labour groups to decide for themselves in the light of local circumstances.'[234] Although leaving the matter up to local councils accounted for regional variability, it could also cause serious problems. Shapely has noted that the introduction of 'economic' rents by Labour councils were more often than not met with furious protests, as tenants 'were not interested in the council's increasing financial burden.'[235] Correspondingly, Roy Hattersley described how he attempted to introduce differential rents in Sheffield in the early 1960s, but was turned down by the Labour Group three times.[236] In this regard, Frank Allaun was rather prescient in a 1956 edition of *Tribune*, where as one of the aforementioned letter-writers he advised '…if Labour controlled local authorities increase their rents it will be on Labour councillors that the tenants vent their wrath.'[237] Cullingworth claimed in a May 1964 *Socialist Commentary* piece that the 'false' separation of public housing from other tenures hid the fact that *all* required some sort of subsidy.[238] As discussed with regards to owner-occupation, this rather artificial separation of tenures meant that they would invariably come into conflict – and, more ominously, be capable of being weaponised politically.

In the LPRD's 1967 housing policy review, it was suggested that 'the Labour Party has never really decided to what extent it regards housing as a

[231] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter from Watford Borough Council Labour Group to LPRD Local Government Officer (7 January 1961).
[232] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter from LPRD Local Government Officer to Watford Borough Council Labour Group (11 January 1961).
[233] Ibid.
[234] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter from LPRD Local Government Officer to W.B. Powell (15 October 1962).
[235] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 166.
[236] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[237] LSEA, *Tribune* (17 February 1956), 10.
[238] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (May 1964), 23.

social service to be available to all according to need not income.'[239] Following their entry into government in 1964, Labour were in the position to decide this, but they did not seize the opportunity to do so. Labour certainly put public housing at the centre of their plans philosophically, but were rather imprecise about how it might be the agent of modern change that they desired. The rapidly deteriorating economic situation that the Wilson government inherited in 1964 greatly reduced freedom of movement in this regard. Equally, in the mid-1960s, the Conservatives had begun to capitalise on resentment relating to high rates and the low rents of some council tenants amongst those not living in public housing. This stoked popular prejudice toward the 'myth of the wealthy council tenant with the Bentley in front of his house.'[240] As has been noted, the policy of aggressive council house sales by some Conservative councils was a key part of this. Labour therefore found themselves on the defensive during their time in government, as they attempted to prevent public housing from becoming a 'residual' tenure whilst having to introduce 'economic' rents that, perversely, made this situation more likely.

Public housing 'should provide really cheap rents for those whose means are limited' read a report of the Housing Policy Study Group in April 1969. In spite of this laudable aim, the report went on to warn that if the pay-outs from rebate schemes were too great, revenues would suffer and rents would invariably have to be raised.[241] This presented something of a discrepancy – 'really cheap rents' would be difficult to provide if a certain level of revenue was to be expected. According to a December 1963 piece in *Labour's Northern Voice*, this contradiction was due to 'two differing conceptions' by which local authorities approached public housing. The first view was of public housing as an investment, tending to 'maximise the rent income', the second was of housing as a social service, where rents were instead a means of writing off the capital cost of building.[242] In effect, housing could not be a social service if it was principally a revenue generator for local government. The piece acknowledged that the rents of uncontrolled private homes were sometimes compared unfavourably with the 'feather bedding' of council tenants, but pointed

[239] LHA, LPRD Re/124, 'Housing Policies: A Review' (April 1967).
[240] LHA, *Talking Points* (31 July 1970), 2.
[241] LHA, LPRD Re/448, Housing Policy Study Group, 'Report of the Housing Policy Study Group' (April 1969).
[242] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (December 1963), 4.

out that private landlords were 'unconcerned with social considerations.'[243] Even accounting for the enormous financial costs of housing, there was a clear sense that public housing would be more easily defended were it universal. Throughout the 1960s, the Conservatives reinforced the 'myth of the oversubsidized council tenant' still further, playing upon a popular belief that 'middle-class ratepayers were subsidizing feckless workers', particularly illustrated by Jones in Brighton.[244] By 1970, Labour were forced to justify public housing as the tenure of the least well-off, referring in 1970 to the 1968 Prices and Incomes Report, covering 232,000 tenancies, which suggested fifty per cent of couples had a combined income of less than £20 a week.[245] This was some way distant from Labour's lofty concept of public housing as a 'social service'. Glen O'Hara has remarked that the 'wobbly pillar' of the welfare state 'attracted increasing opprobrium and scepticism as the post-war era wore on.'[246] In failing to place public housing as a modern, universal social service comparable to the NHS or the state pension in the public eye, the council home could be pushed out of the modern picture.

Of course, there was an alternative means of creating a 'social service'. Non-state actors, such as housing associations or co-operatives, were periodically mooted by those within Labour as a possible substitute for the local authority. Daunton has remarked that it 'should not be taken for granted that state assistance to social housing should inevitably take the form of council housing', pointing to the French *Habitations à Loyer Modéré*, which could be co-operatively owned.[247] Labour's sister party, the Co-operative Party, was one source of this alternative thinking, and whilst not a particularly powerful force in Labour politics, its ideas at points were. Perhaps most significant, however, was a broad governmental interest in 'Scandinavian' methods of housing in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Co-operative accommodation had the potential to free the tenant from state interference, and to free the local authority from the costs of direct provision. However, the greatest obstacle to ancillary thinking on housing was to be Labour-controlled councils, who were less than inclined to surrender their powers (and properties) to untried alternatives. Investigating the

[243] Ibid., 4.
[244] Harloe, *The People's Home*, 287; Jones, 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization', 528.
[245] LHA, *Talking Points* 31 July 1970), 2.
[246] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 2.
[247] Daunton, *Property-Owning Democracy*, 8-9.

spread of co-operative ideas within Labour allows us to question why this particular course of modernity was not taken.

Collective forms of housing not provided by the state had a relatively long history, as well as a sporadic association with socialism. Thomas Linehan has described how *fin-de-siècle* socialists attempted to create 'rival socialist space' to that of the capitalist city, with small-scale settlements such as Whiteways in the Cotswolds, founded in 1898, which was based on common ownership.[248] The Garden City movement of the early twentieth century, which advocated the dispersal of city populations to small-scale new settlements (discussed further in the following chapter) favoured community ownership. Peter Hall commented that Ebenezer Howard, the founder of the movement, intended to create 'self-governing local welfare states.'[249] Whilst several Labour members were rather suspicious of the Garden City movement, Herbert Morrison – later to be Home Secretary during the Second World War – had once been a resident of Letchworth and advocated garden city ideals in the early 1920s.[250] Charitable organisations such as the Sutton Trust also built self-contained housing estates during the inter-war years, let at 'fair rents' and aimed at establishing communal ideals.[251] In addition to charitable trusts, public utility societies had operated as house-builders since the 1890s, though as Malpass has described, they were actively prevented from taking a larger role in the provision of slum clearance accommodation by local authorities in the 1930s.[252] This pattern of council opposition to any attempt to take the provision of socially rented homes away from them would continue whenever the matter was raised. It was a particularly acute issue for Labour post-war – the party tended to take the view that if the task of building the modern, socialist utopia was to be done, then it was best to do it themselves.

Labour began to explore the possibility of alternative forms of housing in the mid-1950s. A January 1956 *Labour Woman* article visited Fru Larsen of Copenhagen, who was living in an owner-occupied house, self-built from a government housing loan, which was to be repaid at extremely favourable terms

[248] Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 68-9.
[249] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 133.
[250] Dennis Hardy, *Utopian England: Community Experiments 1900-1945* (London, 2000), 81.
[251] Patricia L. Garside, 'Citizenship, civil society and quality of life: Sutton Model Dwellings Estates 1919-38', in Robert Colls and Richard Rodger (eds.), *Cities of Ideas: Civil Society and Urban Governance in Britain 1800-2000* (Aldershot, 2004), 258-82.
[252] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 45-48.

– the family's municipal tax was suspended for twenty years whilst the loan was paid off.[253] The fact that the Larsens were also active members of the Danish Social Democratic Party might have made this idea still more appealing for the readers.[254] In April 1956, Labour's Housing Policy Study Group discussed the possibility of using 'modern housing associations as a form of public ownership complementary to municipalisation.'[255] The writers of the report approvingly noted the examples of trade union sponsorship of housing associations in Holland, and of co-operative organisations in Sweden, suggesting that a 'National Housing Association' could be created to build houses in overspill areas where small local authorities might struggle to do so.[256] However, the fact that once completed, the houses 'would be handed over to the local authority to manage', with concern being expressed that a housing association would not keep rents low enough, demonstrates that Labour actors were not willing to cede control to non-state bodies.[257]

Accordingly, *Homes For The Future* stated that housing associations should have a subordinate role to the local authorities, as it was in Labour's view 'essential that the 'public landlord' should have a close personal interest in both the property and the tenants.'[258] Comments by the LPRD Local Government Officer to MacColl's draft 1957 pamphlet on municipalisation seem to indicate further interest in housing associations. 'It may be necessary', the Local Government Officer noted, for councils to 'set up a non-profit making Housing Association' to run municipalised housing, with a majority of the governing board made up of tenants.[259] The motive of this suggestion seemed to be to reduce the costs of municipalisation for local authorities, as by devolving control of municipalised properties to tenants councils 'would know [their] own financial position.'[260] However, the following year's *100 Questions Asked and Answered on Labour's Housing Policy* was far more ambiguous about the role of co-operatives or housing associations, stating simply that they could potentially lease municipalised estates from councils and that

[253] LHA, *Labour Woman* (January 1956), 40.
[254] Ibid., 40.
[255] LHA, LPRD Re/55, Housing Study Group, 'Housing Policy Statement' (April 1956), 22.
[256] Ibid., 22-23.
[257] Ibid., 23.
[258] LHA, Labour Party, *Homes For The Future*, 15.
[259] LSEA, LPRD comments to *Plan for Rented Houses*, 9.
[260] Ibid., 9.

'experiments on such lines will be encouraged.'[261] Though Labour were willing to appear supportive of new approaches, it may be that the party was less willing to carry them out in practice.

The Co-operative Party were far clearer on their plans for co-operative housing, though in a 1959 pamphlet they were anxious to distinguish between philanthropic 'retail housing associations' and their preferred approach of co-operative housing associations with tenants as shareholders.[262] The party reasoned that 'without a proper diffusion of power and responsibility, democracy dies', pointing to assistance given by the Labour-controlled Willesden borough council to a co-operative set up by tenants in a private block of flats as something all councils ought to do.[263] In spite of this, the Co-operative Party proved unable to influence the Labour leadership to any great degree, to the extent that they were by the late 1950s viewed by much of Labour as either a 'potential usurper' or a 'dead weight.'[264] Alternative ideas would be most favourably received from an international context.

An opening for these ideas was provided by the 1961 Housing Act, introduced by the Conservative government of Harold Macmillan, which provided for two types of co-operative housing. 'Cost-rent' non-profit associations were to be formed by builders and administrators to let flats to the public, and 'Co-ownership' societies were to be formed of collectives of proprietors aiming to lease their dwellings back from the society pool.[265] However, O'Hara has described the Macmillan government's interest in 'Scandinavian' options for housing as a means of 'encouraging housebuilding without further attacking rent controls, or returning to the general council housebuilding that Labour had always advocated.'[266] The question is, then, whether in the context of this convivial atmosphere for co-operative thinking Labour were genuinely moved to experiment with it. Writing in a January 1962 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, the General Secretary of the Co-operative Party, Harold Campbell, argued that housing co-ops could make large savings on maintenance as the inhabitants of their homes were 'at once tenants and

[261] LHA, Labour Party, *100 Questions*, 23.
[262] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Co-operative Party, *Housing: A Co-Operative Approach* (1959), 9.
[263] Ibid., 9 and 19.
[264] Thomas F. Carbery, *Consumers in Politics: A History and General Review of the Co-Operative Party* (Manchester, 1969), 113.
[265] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 41.
[266] Ibid. 45.

landlords.'[267] Tony Crosland was sufficiently interested in co-operative ideas to assert in *The Conservative Enemy* that co-operatives would be an ideal replacement for the private landlord.[268] Co-operatives also offered the possibility of evading criticism for rent rises – an LPRD note expressed enthusiasm for tenants' democracy as a means of setting rent levels, pointing to the abolition of rent control in Sweden in 1957, after which 'the rents were decided after negotiations with the tenants' organizations.'[269] However, in practice it would seem most councils were not as inspired by co-operative housing. A letter to the LPRD local government section of September 1964 by a pre-fab tenant from Stockport complained that the forty-home estate in which she lived was to be demolished, and that 'many of us have greenhouses, garages, good neighbours and cultivated gardens which we do not wish to relinquish.'[270] She asked whether it would be possible to set up a housing society and reconstruct the homes on-site – while the local government officer provided her with information on the subject, it would seem that most councils were unwilling to offer this possibility.[271]

Labour had pledged to create a 'Housing Corporation' to expand upon the 1961 Housing Act on taking office in 1964, but as its term in government went on, it became apparent that co-operative housing would remain marginal.[272] Nonetheless, both Campbell and another leading Co-operative Party member, Edward Clark, were appointed to the Housing Corporation when it was finally created in 1967.[273] On the face of it, this offered considerable possibilities – Housing Corporation loans could provide up to a third of a society's capital, over forty years.[274] In a February 1968 report on tenants' democracy, the Housing Policy Study Group stated that 'co-ownership housing is an expression of Co-operative or Socialist principles in a grass-roots form.'[275] However, the report also admitted that local authorities were reluctant 'to accept

[267] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1962), 9.
[268] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 190.
[269] LHA, LPRD Rd/177, 'Housing Finance in Sweden' (March 1964).
[270] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter to Local Government Officer from Mrs Croughton (9 September 1964).
[271] LHA, Local Government Box, Letter to Mrs Croughton from Local Government Officer (17 September 1964);
[272] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 91.
[273] Carbery, *Consumers in Politics*, 179.
[274] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 45.
[275] LHA, LPRD Re/262, Housing Policy Study Group, 'Democracy and Public Housing' (February 1968), 3.

[co-operatives] as suitable for development', and only a 'fraction' of the 25,000 co-operative homes that had been proposed by the Co-ownership Development Society were likely to be built.[276] Though this implied a positive role for co-operative ideas, the same paper admitted that the local authorities were the greatest obstacle to stimulating co-operative housing societies.[277] O'Hara has stated that 'entrenched institutional power' was steadfast in the face of new housing approaches.[278] Moreover, a January 1969 *Socialist Commentary* article by Campbell noted that 'the sector for whom co-ownership *cannot* cater is growing', due to rising costs of land and the refusal of building societies to lend to co-operative societies.[279] The central bodies of Labour retained an interest in the Scandinavian example of co-operative housing, but offered few solutions on how local authorities might be persuaded to utilise the model. Modern as they appeared, co-operatives and housing associations were seen by Labour councillors as at best an inferior irrelevance, and, at worst, a dangerous competitor for resources.

A LPRD memorandum in March 1964 asserted 'the essence of socialism appertains not just to the quantity of goods we make, but of the quality of life we lead.'[280] It might be considered that if Labour were concerned with providing a quality of life that best reflected their ideal of a socialist future, then inexpensive, decent houses run by a 'public landlord' were a major part of this. However, the difficulty of making this vision economically viable threatened the intellectual basis of public housing as a 'social service'. The various differential and rent rebate schemes could ensure that the neediest were provided for, but they had the disadvantage of reducing the attractiveness of the council waiting list to those with better incomes. Most of all, the 'bureaucracy' of variable rent schemes appeared to some socialists as little better than the indignity of the inter-war means test – though Hattersley epitomised many in favour of variable rents in his argument that it was better for subsidies to be 'complicated than inadequate.'[281] The sporadic Labour attempts to experiment with co-operatives and housing associations were more often than not seen as an unnecessary complication by local councils focused on their own building programmes. This

[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 45.
[279] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1969), 17-18.
[280] LHA, LPRD Rd/748, 'The Quality of Living' (March 1964), 1.
[281] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1965), 11.

became particularly so in the straitened economic circumstances of the mid-1960s, where co-operatives appeared to be complicated, and inadequate for the task of providing homes. Shapely has noted that a consensus had existed since the 1920s that 'the council was the best vehicle for reform' – though this consensus began to break down in the 1960s, it was still dominant enough to defeat co-operative pretensions.[282] Labour's modern, socialist aims were founded on the notion that only a strong state could deliver their transformative agenda. In this regard and in the view of most within Labour, the instrument of modern change had to be the council home – anything else would risk failure.

Conclusion

In a piece in early January 2014 for the *London Review of Books*, the journalist James Meek questioned the assumptions many of us have made about council housing in present-day Britain, stating he did not

> expect to find myself living in a council house in the traditional sense – that is, a household dwelling owned and run by the state – any time soon. But that's more to do with the shortage of council houses, and the way they're run, than with any objection on principle, or a conviction that council houses are doomed to be ugly and uncomfortable.[283]

Meek's piece is revealing of both the status of public housing in the present day, and the way in which housing tenure has changed in Britain over the last forty years. In 2011, for the first time since the early 1960s, the private rented sector overtook the social rented sector in size.[284] The popular legacy of the public housing sector in early twenty-first century Britain is not an overwhelmingly positive one, to the extent that there remains a powerful notion that the failure of state intervention in housing is inevitable.[285] This was not the attitude of Labour in the post-war period – as James MacColl concluded in 1957 'a free market in

[282] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 115.
[283] *London Review of Books*, 36:1 (9 January 2014), 7-16 at 10.
[284] Department for Communities and Local Government, *English Housing Survey 2013-14* (10 July 2013), 25. Accessed online 25 April 2016: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461439/EHS_Households_2013-14.pdf
[285] Rogaly and Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community*, 43.

housing is impossible to obtain, and if it were obtained it would not do the job set for it.'[286] It would seem a relatively apt description of the broad Labour attitude towards the housing market. The free market was a damaging illusion, and those within Labour believed that they should strive to replace the anachronisms of Victorian capitalism with a modern, socialist housing system. This was not solely the story of public housing – Labour's approach to the owner-occupied and privately rented sections of the housing market had a direct effect on the provision of public housing, as much as policy towards public housing affected the other two tenures. Indeed, whilst the private rented sector had collapsed to less than twenty per cent of total households by 1971, the owner-occupied sector was nearing fifty per cent.[287] In spite of the interdependency of the housing market, Labour tended to deal with each tenure in isolation – there could be no all-encompassing, modern housing policy whilst the council home, privately rented home and the owner-occupied home were seen as substantively different from one another.

If one element of Labour's modern, socialist project could be said to have almost succeeded, it was the attempted abolition of the private landlord. This stood to reason – throughout the period 1945-70, Labour actors caricatured the landlord as an effectively anti-modern figure. Indeed, Alderman Bradbeer of Birmingham Labour Party claimed in 1945 that his Conservative counterparts derived their wealth from 'the landlordism of the slums, the exploitation of labour with low wages, long hours and sweated conditions, the fear of sickness, the scourge of unemployment and the dread of the workhouse.'[288] The supposedly clear link between urban deprivation, Victorian avarice and Tory doctrine would lose little of its potency for Labour members throughout the period. This being said, Labour were unwilling to stomach the prospect of actually taking the entire private rental stock into public ownership, ultimately introducing an enhanced form of regulation during their time in government from 1964-70. This compromise left the private rented sector in a poor state – Labour had assisted in running down the tenure, but belatedly decided that it would form a part of the modern future.

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[286] LHA, MacColl, *Plan For Rented Houses*, 31.
[287] Department for Communities and Local Government, *English Housing Survey 2013-14* (10 July 2013), 18. Accessed online 25 April 2016: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461439/EHS_Households_2013-14.pdf
[288] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Town Crier* (27 October 1945), 2.

Labour actors were far more willing to countenance an expansion of owner-occupation in addition to the public stock, but with considerable reservations from their grassroots and local councils. For some Labour members, there was an element of truth in Harry Dickens' claim that 'whatever they say, they don't *like* private property.'[289] Others were more sanguine about the prospect of wider owner-occupation: surprisingly Victory For Socialism and contributors to the left-leaning *Tribune* and *Labour's Northern Voice* fall into this category. Labour engagement with the 'property-owning democracy' appeared to be more than just a revisionist musing. In spite of this, Labour could only ever see private ownership as part of a balanced modern housing market – not as a vanguard tenure. Conversely, the Conservatives aggressively pushed their antithetical vision, with the promotion of council house sales in the late 1960s ensuring that Labour would always be outdone. Even more liberally minded Labour members would never agree to sell off the public stock *en masse*.

In 1962, the North Kensington Labour Party claimed that 'a man is entitled to an adequate house for himself and his family and the community should accept the responsibility of providing this as a social service.'[290] Quite apart from the gendered tone with which they made this pronouncement, the sentiment of North Kensington Labour neatly captures the reasoning behind Labour's drive to create swathes of council homes. Housing would, in this view, take its place as one of the modern social services, with the slum merely a bad memory. However, Labour proved incapable of deciding whether public housing should have low rents for all, or to utilise the subsidy principally for those most in need. A letter to *Socialist Commentary* in November 1960 took issue with the latter notion, arguing that differential rent schemes overlooked the fact that council tenants already paid according to their ability – indirectly, through the tax system.[291] However, whilst this view was certainly shared by plenty of Labour members, the party were unable to make the according shift in the way in which housing was financed – through much larger subsidies. Equally, the unwillingness of local authorities to cede any housing power to

[289] LSEA, Dickens, *Whose Home*, 18.
[290] LHA, LPRD Rd/203, North Kensington Labour Party, 'Conclusions of a Study Group on Housing' (January 1962).
[291] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (November 1960), 25.

third-party housing bodies, such as co-operatives, housing associations or charitable trusts, meant that the burden could only fall on them (and the ratepayer).

For all its inconsistencies, Labour housing policy in the period 1945-70 did offer a relatively detailed vision of the urban future. Labour unequivocally wanted to transform the housing market, and the party unquestionably did so, though perhaps not entirely in the way in which they had intended. To return to Meek's article, he commented that 'the slum-to-council-house journey was a one-off, exclusively for two past generations.'[292] Setting aside the assumptions inherent in Meek's comment, it historicises post-war housing policy as something with which we can have little connection. However, the built environment is not something wholly of the past – much of the product of post-war housing policy still stands around us and is lived in. Although those generations who did gain council houses did so because of particular governmental choices in policy, it is equally important not to dismiss post-war housing policy as a historical quirk. Labour's contribution to the reshaping of post-war housing market was predicated on an attempt to bring their modern, socialist vision to all. As the party stated in the 1960 policy publication *Signposts For The Sixties*, 'to stand still is to decline.'[293] The message was clear – the way that the British population lived, in Labour's reading, needed to be changed for the radical better. Whether in debates over private rentals, expanding owner-occupation or the availability of public housing (or social housing of a variety of types), the driving forces behind Labour housing policy in the period 1945-70 are reflected in the present day. If the 'modern moment' was a historically contingent phenomenon, many of the issues it attempted to address were not.

[292] Meek, 'Where will we live', 7-16.
[293] LHA, Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties*, 8.

Chapter Two: Planning the Socialist City

Planning, Urban Transport, Land and Slum Clearance

Introduction

Speaking on the bill for the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act in the House of Commons, the Labour MP for Mitcham, Tom Braddock argued that 'it will be said that mistakes may be made [in planning], but we must no longer be afraid of making mistakes.'[1] He went on to assert that 'great town planners' such as Patrick Abercrombie had been denied the opportunity to practice their craft in the past, and 'after all, in questions of design and of town and country planning, it is very often a matter of opinion.'[2] Braddock's latter point is emphatic of Labour's broader attitude to urban transformation after 1945 – in the opinion of many Labour members, British cities were unplanned and symbolic of an unwanted past. Any complaints about radical, modern change were part of the process. Unusually amongst MPs, Braddock had actually been an architect before parliament – in this regard it is possible to glimpse the meeting of urban modernism with modern socialism. Far beyond the doorstep of the home – whether council house, privately let or owner-occupied – Labour actors concerned themselves with planning the cityscape of the future. It is important to note that this was not simply idiosyncratic dogma, though there was some of that. Throughout the years 1945 to 1970, parts of British cities were not too distant from Hoggart's description of Hunslet as 'a study in shades of dirty-grey, without greenness or the blueness of sky.'[3] Conversely, Labour's *vision* of a modern, socialist city was one in which the iniquities of the industrial, Victorian city would be swept clear. Reshaping the city in a progressive manner would, in the opinion of left-wing planners, remove many of the spatial obstacles to the success of cities and citizenry.

Planning did not stop at the city boundary – as the geographer (and *Socialist Commentary* contributor) Peter Hall noted, it logically included the area *around* the city as well as within it, given inevitable expansion.[4] This chapter

[1] *Hansard*, (Commons), 432 (30 January 1947), 112-241, accessed online 14 June 2016 at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1947/jan/30/town-and-country-planning-bill.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1992), first published 1957, 59.
[4] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 6.

will examine four key elements of urban planning: the intellectual planning and process of construction of the city; the planning of urban transport; the politics of land control; and slum clearance. In each case, it is possible to glimpse the modern, socialist rationale behind the urban transformations that would take place. In particular, this chapter will seek to question what Labour understandings of modernity meant in terms of the urban environment, and why members of the party saw the provision of better housing as a means of eliminating urban deprivation. In terms of the latter, Barbara Castle – MP for Blackburn from 1945, as well as Minister for Transport and Employment Secretary in the Wilson governments – would write in her diary in 1966 that she 'objected to the tendency to label [housing programmes] a 'Socialist' priority as though other programmes were not.'[5] Even if Castle was sceptical, it is clear why reshaping the urban environment had been seen as a high priority. On a visit to the Gorbals slums of Glasgow in August 1956, the *Tribune* correspondent Mervyn Jones remarked that 'collapse seems to be winning a race with reconstruction.'[6] Though this might have represented the worst of post-war British cities, the fact that ten years later much of urban Britain *remained* in such a state makes the Labour impetus to rip it all down and start again understandable.

The power of political ideas have at times been underestimated in urban history, due to what Frank Mort has described as a 'particular reading' of urban planning as 'rationally judged political and professional initiatives.'[7] In this regard, discussions of modernist transformation can be so thoroughly stripped of political thought that as Otto Saumarez Smith recently lamented, there has been a tendency to suggest 'that a set of architectural ideas were foisted upon the country.'[8] This thesis instead asserts that the political culture underpinning Labour's fragmentary sense of modernity was key to the planning and realisation of Britain's urban environment. Pragmatic concerns had their place, but it is difficult to have a complete understanding of the post-war urban changes within Britain without accounting for *political* conceptions of modernity. This was apparent in Labour attempts to use the New Town to supersede the

[5] Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-70* (London, 1984), 186.
[6] LSEA, *Tribune* (24 August 1956), 6.
[7] Frank Mort, 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life: Planning London in the 1940s', *The Journal of British Studies*, 43:1 (2004), 120-151 at 122-123.
[8] Otto Saumarez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland: a Sixties Architect-Planner and the Political Culture of the British Left', *Architectural History* 57 (2014), 393-422 at 395.

suburb. Labour actors saw the suburb as 'unwelcoming to socialism', but the New Town was initially viewed as distinct – the spacious, healthy living environment that the party wanted for the people.[9] Similarly, the reshaping of older urban areas by Labour-controlled councils was not simply a matter of hard-headed politicians taking the least-worst option, but was intrinsic to their modernism – it was a matter of removing the 'cheap and nasty' houses of the nineteenth century.[10] Labour ideals of modernity could be contradictory. Despite seeing a cohesive public transport network as integral to overcoming the chaotic urban past, Labour actors nonetheless built modern cities where the car was dominant. Existing histories of post-war planning have tended to overlook the links between transport policy and urban redevelopment.[11] Although Labour's radical plans demanded an end to urban disorder, the policies pursued by the party may have made it worse.

'There was once a time', wrote the socialist author Douglas Brown in 1945, 'when the land was the common heritage of all.'[12] Labour's plans throughout the period aimed to achieve this end. Yet the party could not come to a conclusive decision on how this was to be achieved, opting for a variety of legislative measures with mixed effects. Though the politics of land reform have largely been an aside in post-war planning history, Labour's interest in the matter may suggest the failure to socialise the land undermined major urban projects. One such major project was slum clearance. Tony Crosland would claim in 1962 that 'much of built-up Britain is little better than a Victorian slum, a drab and oppressive legacy of the first Industrial Revolution.'[13] For Labour, then, the aim of slum clearance was then to remove this 'oppressive legacy.' Some of what Crosland spoke of was beyond redemption, but Labour's pursuit of slum clearance is demonstrative of the implausibility of the modern ideal. The demolition and reconstruction of the city became an end in itself, before it became clear that to do so would be futile.

A 1944 Communist pamphlet stated that although Britain was at the cusp of 'an unparalleled age of science and invention', millions struggled against 'dirt,

[9] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 119.
[10] LHA, Co-operative Party, *Housing: A Co-Operative Approach*, 3.
[11] Two examples of histories that have engaged with this connection are: Gunn, 'People and the car'; and Colin G. Pooley and Jean Turnbull, 'Commuting, transport and urban form: Manchester and Glasgow in the mid-twentieth century', *Urban History* (2000), 27:3, 360-383.
[12] LHA, LP/362.5/318, Douglas Brown, *An Englishman's Home* (1945), 16.
[13] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 190.

vermin, disease and discomfort.'[14] Labour's own aims for urban planning were invigorated by a socialist urge to banish dirt and vermin. Those within the party saw the promise of the atomic age as the means of bringing forth utopia. The very fact that this utopia did *not* occur challenges the historian to consider what political ideals guided the urban transformation that did.

Realising the Modern City: Labour as planners

The novelist and playwright J.B. Priestley undertook a tour of the 'new England' in 1933 from Southampton to Newcastle, writing his experiences in *English Journey.*[15] In one well-remembered passage, Priestley identified 'three Englands':

> Old England, the country of the cathedrals and minsters and manor houses and inns, of Parson and Squire'…the nineteenth-century England, the industrial England of coal, iron, steel, cotton, wool, railways...a cynically devastated countryside, sooty dismal little towns, and still sootier grim fortress-like cities…the England of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages…and everything given away for cigarette coupons…[16]

His rich description of what had changed, and what had not, is illustrative of the concerns facing Labour after 1945. Priestley was principally concerned with the deprivation, ugliness and unhealthy atmosphere of 'industrial England', which he regarded as damaging to both the landscape and its people.[17] Correspondingly, reshaping the sooty 'fortress-like cities' had been an aim of those within Labour since the party's foundation. Mort has argued that the 'cultural origins and effects' of post-war planning have been overlooked in urban history, despite the fact that such plans often revealed a 'potent form of practical utopianism.'[18] This 'practical utopianism' was not novel. Austria's paradigmatic

[14] LHA, LP/362.5/318, Communist Party of Great Britain (hereafter CPGB), *Memorandum on Housing* (1944), 5.
[15] J.B. Priestley, *English Journey*, 75th Anniversary Ed. (London, 2009), first published 1934.
[16] Ibid., 335-8.
[17] Ibid., 343.
[18] Mort, 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life', 123.

'Red Vienna' had seen Labour's sister party, the Social Democrats, attempt to make the city into a 'model of municipal socialism that would prefigure the coming socialist society.'[19] Equally, planning remains contested, with a popular narrative remaining that 'ordinary people's wishes were ignored, as common sense was jettisoned in favour of dogma.'[20] As a party inclined to paternalism, this charge has not escaped Labour. Indeed, the period 1945-70 saw a shift from grand, transformative urban planning to more limited 'community' planning, represented by the 1969 Report of the Skeffington Committee on Public Participation.[21] The manner in which these plans were *realised* will also be examined in this section, with the role of council-controlled direct labour and industrialised building in facilitating redevelopment of central city areas investigated. What, then, did Labour's modern, socialist plans mean for the planning of the urban environment?

Urban planning, or 'town and country planning' as it has often been referred to by British practitioners, began to be established as a professional discipline in the early twentieth century. By the 1940s, planning formed a major part of the policy landscape, aided by a 'vast framework of structural planning powers.'[22] In the Victorian era, urban planning had to been linked to limited municipal housing schemes, whereas the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act enabled more ambitious urban extensions or redevelopment to take place.[23] Planning as a discipline originated from architecture, with the Garden City movement focusing the early field.[24] Founded in 1899 by Ebenezer Howard and based on the ideals of his 1898 book *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path To Real Reform*, the Garden City Association promoted Howard's dream of low-density, land-holding utopian communities surrounded by 'green belts' of undeveloped land. Only two were created, at Letchworth in 1903 and Welwyn Garden City in 1920.[25] The American activist and community planner Jane Jacobs would later criticise Howard's vision as 'almost feudal', claiming that Howard sought a

[19] Eve Blau, 'From Red Superblock to Green Megastructure: Municipal Socialism as a Model and Challenge' in Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Abingdon, 2015), 27-50 at 38.
[20] Abigail Beach and Nick Tiratsoo, 'The Planners and the Public' in Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Vol. 3, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 525-550 at 525.
[21] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 42.
[22] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 97.
[23] Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (London, 1986), 25-6.
[24] Ibid., 50.
[25] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 93.

'static society' by resisting metropolitan fluidity.[26] Conversely, Glendinning and Muthesius argue that realising the 'Garden City' ideal 'would have required nothing short of political revolution' to allow for the relocation of enormous numbers of people.[27] Though many within Labour were suspicious of the bourgeois character of the Garden City movement, Herbert Morrison – later leader of London County Council (LCC) and Deputy Prime Minister in the Attlee government – was briefly a resident of Letchworth during the First World War, and suggested building twenty-three similar towns around London in 1920.[28] Regardless of Labour misgivings, Garden City principles of low density guided the development of inter-war LCC public housing, though they were uninterested in 'decentralisation.'[29]

The prominence of the Garden City ideal was in fact due to its adaptability. Raymond Unwin – a disciple of Howard – had served on the 1918 Tudor Walters Committee, which established state-sponsored housing in Britain. Unwin advocated stripped-down satellite settlements for major cities and his proposals influenced most peripheral housing schemes between the wars.[30] Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford would also have considerable influence over the direction of post-war planning. Geddes – a planner principally known for his work across the British Empire, most notably in Tel Aviv – believed it was the planner's job to discern the 'present tendency [of an urban environment]' from the 'phantasmagoria of change.'[31] Conversely, Mumford wanted 'communities' to transcend 'the sinister limitations of the metropolitan environment.''[32] This notion of 'community' had a strong influence over Labour, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, and Mumford's 1940 *The Culture of Cities* was distributed to Coventry's Labour council.[33] Tom Braddock would write in 1953 that great cities such as Glasgow and Manchester should be 'split up into their original small communities and great

[26] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London, 1962), 289.
[27] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 325.
[28] Hardy, *Utopian England*, 81.
[29] Patricia L. Garside, 'Politics, ideology and the issue of open space in London, 1939-2000' in Peter Clark (ed.), *The European City and Green Space: London, Stockholm, Helsinki and St Petersburg 1850-2000* (Aldershot, 2006), 68-98 at 73.
[30] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 108-9.
[31] Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (London, 1949) first published 1915, 1-2. On the Tel Aviv plan, Geddes' vision of a modernist 'White City' was partially realised in British mandated Palestine and forms the iconic core of the Israeli capital.
[32] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London, 1940), 493.
[33] Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics*, 9.

avenues of open space, horticultural and market gardens, parks etc., driven through the areas.'[34] In this he echoed the nineteenth century socialist Robert Blatchford, who had written in 1893 of a fictionalised Manchester filled with flowering public gardens.[35] Removing the 'sinister limitations' of cities remained an undertone of Labour plans – in a 1951 publication commemorating the Festival of Britain, Labour asserted that 'in place of the old disorder and ugliness we must build fine new communities. Town planning means that the health and the happiness of the people comes first.'[36] For all the distaste of party members for the deficiencies of urban capitalism, Labour was a profoundly *urban* force. The gaze of the party was – and still is – fixed upon the city, not the country.

'Indispensable opportunities' for change would come with the Second World War.[37] Major wartime commissions on national planning issues – the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt committees on the distribution of industry, use of rural land and on land compensation respectively – all recommended a centralised system of planning in the face of 1930s overdevelopment and economic decline in parts of Britain.[38] An even more pressing consideration was wartime damage: 450,000 dwellings had been destroyed or were uninhabitable, with a further four million damaged.[39] The interruption of building during the war also added to housing pressures.[40] In spite of this, Labour was not without optimism. A 1941 NEC memorandum on town planning noted that destruction through bombing 'gives rise to unprecedented possibilities for re-planning.'[41] In a similar manner, a 1942 memorandum asserted that 'whilst the demand for houses has been seriously increased, the possibility of doing so in a thoroughgoing way has also been increased.'[42] The opposite of 'thoroughgoing' development was Priestley's 'England of arterial and by-pass roads', which horrified Labour, architects and town planners alike. Inter-war 'ribbon'

[34] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Tom Braddock, *Houses, Rents and the Building Trade* (1953), 16.
[35] Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 94-5.
[36] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Festival* (1951), 7.
[37] McKibbin, *Parties and People*, 144.
[38] Ravetz, *Government of Space*, 32.
[39] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 56.
[40] Ibid., 58.
[41] LHA, LPRD Rdr/14, Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee, 'Memorandum on Some of the Problems of Post-War Reconstruction and Suggested Methods for Their Solution' (14 October 1941), 1.
[42] LHA, LPRD Rdr/55, Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee, 'Preliminary Report' (January 1942), 1.

developments had followed bus services along the new arterial and by-pass roads, with unplanned 'sprawl' vastly extending the urban environment into the countryside.[43] The effect of sprawl around London was significant, with the London Communist leader Ted Bramley claiming in 1938 that London was 'a monument to the anarchy of building.'[44] If modernist planning aimed to create order from chaos, it is clear why Labour were drawn to such ideas.

Reconstruction planning found a wide audience – Patrick Abercrombie and John Forshaw's 1943 *County of London Plan* for the LCC sold nearly 10,000 copies.[45] Their vision saw London radically re-planned at low densities, to avoid a 'jumble of houses and industry' as well as 'lofty close-packed tenements.'[46] Abercrombie and Forshaw also advocated the dispersal of a large part of the population to satellite towns outside of London. Those within Labour were less willing to countenance the wholesale dispersal of the population outside of city boundaries – and outside of council control. In 1943, the Birmingham Borough Labour Party stated that 'Birmingham as a city is large enough', advocating a satellite town for 'overspill', but emphasised that it would be closely linked to Birmingham City Council as it grew.[47] In a 1944 Labour housing pamphlet, the party suggested that 'there must be a considerable measure of decentralisation', but were vague about how much of this might be New Towns or extensions to existing settlements.[48] Conversely, the Communists insisted in a 1944 publication that low densities were impossible, as it would result in cities spreading 'two to three times as far out into the countryside.'[49] Roger Smith has claimed that Abercrombie's 1947 Glasgow plan recommended such a high level of overspill that the Labour council increased densities to lose less of the population.[50] This tension was essentially one of divergent ideologies. Garden City-influenced planners like Abercrombie were anti-urban in character, seeing cities as unhealthy and grotesquely oversized, with the solution to remove the population to the country.

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[43] Ravetz, *Government of Space*, 77-85.
[44] LHA, LP/362.5.53, CPGB, Ted Bramley, *The New London* (1938), 7.
[45] Mort, 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life', 128-9.
[46] Patrick Abercrombie and J.H. Forshaw, *County of London Plan* (London, 1943), 8.
[47] LHA, Birmingham Labour Party, *Homes For the People*, 7 and 13.
[48] LHA, LP/362.5/318, Labour Party, *Housing and Planning After the War: The Labour Party's Post-War Policy* (1944), 11.
[49] LHA, CPGB, *Memorandum on Housing*, 23.
[50] Roger Smith, 'Multi-dwelling Building in Scotland 1750-1970: A study based on housing in the Clyde Valley' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London, 1974), 207-238 at 223.

Whilst Labour members also saw cities as oversized, the party remained pro-urban – for Labour, it was a question of adapting existing cities to people's needs, with an *element* of dispersal.

Projections of high post-war population growth accelerated ideas of dispersal, as did as a utopian sense that low population densities were healthier. Whilst both were a consistent influence on planning, the former was less of a directing force. N.L. Tranter has suggested that the post-war drive to low densities was part of a 'genuine counter-urbanisation phenomenon', based as much on the Garden City-inspired rejection of the industrial city as on fears of overpopulation.[51] The inter-war 'southwards drift' of population to South-East England increased perceptions that British cities were dangerously overcrowded.[52] Favourable attitudes towards dispersal and lower city densities were not universal. The West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, formed in 1941, believed the birth rate would return to the low levels of the 1930s and the population would decline after the 1950s.[53] According to this thinking, 'overspill' development was unnecessary. By contrast, Abercrombie claimed in his 1948 *West Midlands Plan* that the population would increase, making the creation of a New Town for Birmingham imperative.[54] In spite of the resulting baby boom, population projections did not increase in accuracy, with Labour suggesting in 1965 that 'by the end of the century, 72 million people will be living in Britain.'[55] Whilst this did not take place, the expectation that the housing list would increase exponentially was a factor in Labour planning.

In an address to the Town and Country Planning Association on 2 October 1959, Lord Beveridge claimed that 'the New Towns are in intention the most complete of all attacks upon Squalor.'[56] Though not a member of the Labour Party (Beveridge remained a Liberal), Labour took on Beveridge's proposals as a compromise between dispersal and metropolitan life. Beveridge himself went on to chair the New Town Development Corporations of Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee.[57] The New Towns have been one of the most closely

[51] N.L. Tranter, *British Population in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), 54.
[52] Ibid., 8.
[53] Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham*, 124.
[54] Ibid., 126.
[55] LHA, *Talking Points* (29 October 1965), 4.
[56] LSEA, Beveridge Papers, BEVERIDGE/7/2, Lecture by Lord Beveridge to TCPA (2 October 1959).
[57] Ibid.

studied aspects of post-war planning, referred to both as pandering to 'the suburban aspiration in English culture', and as 'expressions of an architectural and environmental modernity, articulated through a language of nostalgia.'[58] This being said, it has also been observed that the New Towns only affected a relatively minor proportion of the urban population.[59] Further to this, cities such as Labour-controlled Manchester attempted initially to build their own 'out-country' suburban estates by expanding their boundaries, rather than dispersing their population via New Towns.[60] Thirteen New Towns were designated under the 1946 New Towns Act, with further waves from 1961 creating twenty-one settlements in total.[61] The New Town represented an integral part of Labour's modern, urban vision. From Basildon to Warrington, New Towns were not simply a rejection of the battered, overcrowded terraces of the Victorian city, but also a 'reaction against the soulless council estates and middle-class suburbs run up between the wars.'[62] In this regard, Clapson's contention that New Towns were the *same* as suburban estates seems misplaced – they may have become more suburban, but Labour's *intention* was to build something rather different.[63] A *Labour Woman* correspondent visiting the New Town of Crawley in May 1951 suggested that 'it is not just another housing estate', pointing to the fact that 'the idea is to build a town complete with industry.'[64] Whilst the industrial base of New Towns would not be a lasting feature, this was an attempt to create genuinely autonomous settlements – not suburban extensions. More controversial within Labour ranks was that New Towns were not managed by the local authorities – rather, by autonomous Development Corporations with boards appointed by the Minister for Town and Country Planning, with direct financing from the Exchequer.[65] Some Labour members believed that the New Towns would not be the radical alternative that they had

[58] Mark Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration in England since 1919', *Contemporary British History* (2000), 14:1, 151-174 at 156 and Alan G.V. Simmonds, 'Conservative governments and the New Town housing question in the 1950s', *Urban History*, 28:1 (2001), 65-83 at 82.
[59] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, 70.
[60] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 134.
[61] Ortalano, 'Planning the Urban Future', 481. The first thirteen were: Stevenage, Crawley, Hemel Hempstead, Harlow, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, Basildon, Bracknell and Corby. From 1961: Skelmersdale, Dawley (redesignated in 1968 as Telford), Redditch, Runcorn, Washington, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Northampton, Warrington and Central Lancashire.
[62] LHA, LP/362.5.53, Norman Mackenzie, *New Towns: The Success of Social Planning* (1955), 1.
[63] Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration', 156.
[64] LHA, *Labour Woman* (May 1951), 104-105.
[65] Ravetz, *Government of Space*, 71-2.

envisaged if left to Development Corporations.

Writing in *Socialist Commentary* in September 1954, the sociologist Michael Young argued that New Towns would fail, as the workers of the towns and their children 'will realise no new town can offer as wide a choice of employment as a city' and would eventually commute elsewhere.[66] He criticised the focus on 'overspill' development, claiming that 'for every bright new house put up at Harlow, Crawley or Basildon, a score are falling down in Birmingham, Bristol and Bradford.'[67] Young's argument would become familiar as the post-war years went on – rather than 'abandoning' the old, Victorian city, Labour should concentrate its efforts in reshaping it, though his own misplaced reasons for this will be explored further in Chapter Three. A board member of Harlow New Town Development Corporation, Stephen Taylor, replied to Young in the same issue, under the heading 'Abandon our Cities? – Certainly Not.' Taylor claimed that the alternative to New Towns was not 'sardining' through higher densities, but 'it is more [peripheral] council estates of the kind he so rightly condemns, or an extension of the suburban sprawl, where a low level of human happiness seems to march in hand with a low Labour vote.'[68] Especially interesting was that both Taylor and Young agreed that the inter-war 'out country housing estates' were a 'disaster,' and both were opposed to private suburbs.[69] Black has described in some depth the Labour unease about suburban living, in particular the suspicion that semi-detached homeliness would turn workers into Tories.[70] These suburban anxieties in terms of class and the community will be approached in Chapter Three. For Labour adherents, the suburb represented a troubling alternative to their modern vision.

There were plenty of Labour voices who regarded the New Towns as the driving force of modern, socialist change. An August 1956 *Labour Woman* article on Peterlee New Town contrasted the house gardens, playing fields and 'beauty of the extensive surrounding fields' of the town with the 'dark, dangerous dirty streets of an industrial town.' Moreover, the piece noted that all councillors for both the town and parish councils were Labour.[71] Writing in a September 1958 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, the Labour MP for

[66] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (September 1954), 251.
[67] Ibid., 253.
[68] Ibid., 255. Taylor had been MP for Barnet 1945-50.
[69] Ibid., 254.
[70] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 127.
[71] LHA, *Labour Woman* (August 1956), 117-8.

Wellingborough George Lindgren suggested that New Towns were the 'practical application of socialist principles', allowing the inhabitants to live and work in 'spacious and gracious surroundings.'[72] The 1959 Labour policy statement *Leisure for Living* claimed that New Towns differed from 'satellite' towns, but at the same time attacked the 'public indifference' and 'private avarice' that had led to 'subtopian' mediocrity in architecture and planning.[73] 'Subtopia' had been coined in 1956 by the architectural journalist Ian Nairn, and swiftly utilised to describe rampant suburban sprawl.[74] In Labour circles, this only hardened the belief that controls over 'out-country' development were necessary.

By the 1960s, the purpose of the New Town was being reassessed – was the New Town a means of redistributing population and industry, or the basis for a new way of living? In a 1960 pamphlet, the planning academic Barry Cullingworth reflected that 'the actual mechanics of developing non-dormitory towns has presented unexpected difficulties.'[75] He accused local authorities of 'wrecking the policy of urban dispersal' by building peripheral housing and increasing their industrial bases, as well as suggesting that many New Towns had not been able to employ their populations within them.[76] Conversely, some within Labour regarded this as evidence that New Towns should be supervised by their 'parent' local authority. Transfer of each New Town to an 'appropriate local authority' was urged in a November 1959 *Labour's Voice* article, with the argument that this would create a 'diversity of industry.'[77] An August 1956 edition of *Tribune* had criticised Crawley Development Corporation's attempt to sell the leases on New Town-owned factories.[78] According to this view, the Development Corporations were capable of building houses, but not to be trusted with providing employment – though as Cullingworth's comments suggest, it was probable that councils had not helped with the latter. Labour actors regarded industrial planning as especially significant in the context of a renewed 'drift south' of population and industry to London and the wider south-east of England in the 1960s. The 1961 policy publication *Towns for Our Times*

[72] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (September 1958), 4.
[73] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE/3/9, Labour Party, *Leisure for Living* (1959), 16-17.
[74] Lawrence Black, 'The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s' in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), 85-106 at 88.
[75] LHA, LP/362.5.53, J.B. Cullingworth, *Restraining Urban Growth: The Problem of Overspill* (1960), 15.
[76] Ibid., 30.
[77] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Voice* (November 1959), 7.
[78] LSEA, *Tribune* (31 August 1956), 4.

compared this process to the 'drift west' of American population and industry to California, warning that 'the forces of expansion in this country will create a built-up area stretching from Dover to Liverpool.'[79] Tranter argues that the attempt to 'counter-urbanise' was able to reduce excessive population increase in London, but failed in attempts to shift the balance of industry elsewhere.[80] This was modernity, but not as Labour wanted it.

Closer control of New Towns became more important to socialist aims. Labour's 1961 *Signposts for the Sixties* argued for 'effective public control over the siting of offices as well as factories', with New Towns seen as means of avoiding 'unchecked sprawl.'[81] The draft of *Towns for Our Times* recommended using New Towns planned as 'counter-magnets to the great conurbation areas', suggesting far larger populations of 250,000 (they were limited at 100,000 in the published version).[82] One possible model was the unbuilt plan for an LCC New Town at Hook in the county of Hampshire, by the leftist architect-planner Graeme Shankland. Hook was an explicitly pro-urban attempt to build a high-density New Town, but it was abandoned by the Conservative government in 1960 in the face of local opposition.[83] In an exchange over the pages of *Socialist Commentary* in 1963, the planner Ron Bryant and geographer Geoffrey Parker debated the merits of urban dispersal. Bryant argued that Britain was in a state of 'metropolitan elephantiasis' and suggested that 'to double or treble the size of Carlisle would be a good contribution to easing congestion further south.'[84] By contrast, Parker suggested that industrial dispersal was like 'making Lancashire into an economic game reserve to keep alive the old working class virtues.'[85] Parker touched upon the major fault-line in Labour thought – should the party attempt to redistribute population and industry or focus on improving existing British cities?

In a 1963 Fabian pamphlet, the historian Paul Thompson asserted that the Geddesian idea that cities were unhealthy had concentrated efforts on New Towns 'rather than on the conurbations in which most of our population live.'[86]

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[79] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE/5/7, Labour Party, *Towns for Our Times* (1960), 14.
[80] Tranter, *British Population*, 59.
[81] LHA, Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties*, 23.
[82] LHA, LPRD Rd/103, Home Policy Sub-Committee, 'Planning and the Community Draft Pamphlet', (January 1961), 13.
[83] Saumarez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland', 401.
[84] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (August 1963), 22.
[85] Ibid., 24.
[86] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE 3/9, Fabian Society, Paul Thompson, *Architecture: art or social service?* (1963), 20.

Socialist Commentary published a major report on planning in September 1961 entitled the 'Face of Britain', drawing upon a host of high-profile contributors including Peter Hall and Peter Willmott. [87] It was in part an unabashed defence of planning by left-leaning planners. Responding to the 'reaction to planning' from local activists inspired by Jane Jacobs and heritage bodies such as the Victorian Society, *Socialist Commentary*'s editorial stated that whilst 'our deep-rooted passion for liberty makes us fiercely distrustful of interference', this could result in an 'absurd sentimentality.'[88] The report began by describing the 'row on row of red-brick terrace housing, crammed in without a hint of green space anywhere' that characterised the inner areas of Birmingham.[89] It went on to assert that private developers 'cannot redevelop congested or obsolete working-class districts', due to need to rehouse the population, and therefore this effort had to be public.[90] Emphasising that their priority was for reshaping existing urban areas, the authors advocated 'new towns within cities.'[91] It would appear that architectural preferences on the left were shifting towards making *existing* cities more 'liveable', rather than creating New Towns as ideal cities. A shift to the urban certainly suited some local authorities – Birmingham Labour Party's 1966 municipal election statement made much of the acquisition of peripheral land at Chelmsley Wood and Castle Bromwich, but made no mention of 'overspill'.[92] Perhaps this was unsurprising – the Labour council were unwilling to allow 'their' population to be removed to Birmingham's designated New Towns of Dawley and Redditch.[93] Nonetheless, Labour's 'urbanist' stance by the early 1960s is demonstrative of the party's belief that to achieve a modern, socialist urban environment, the city had to be rebuilt anew.

Of course, the New Town was only one part of Labour's vision for urban transformation. The most aesthetically striking element of the modern form of British cities was high-density housing in urban redevelopment schemes, many of which were built as high-rise 'tower blocks' of flats. This high-density

[87] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'Face of Britain' (September 1961), xi. Other contributors included: Ron Bryant; David Eversley; the economist Robin Marris; D.L. Munby; the architect-planner Graeme Shankland; and the noted architects Alison and Peter Smithson, later famous for the brutalist Robin Hood Gardens estate in East London.
[88] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (September 1961), 3.
[89] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'Face of Britain' (September 1961), ii.
[90] Ibid., vii.
[91] Ibid., xiii.
[92] BCA, 329.94249, Birmingham Labour Party Papers, 'Labour's Election Statement: Partnership for Prosperity' (1966), 4.
[93] Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham*, 147-9.

revolution was one of public housing and unlike in the New Towns, development was controlled by local authorities. Two factors prompted the move to high-density development in Labour circles. Firstly, high density formed part of the 'modern moment', which saw a genuine belief that high-density urban living was a positive thing, and an accompanying need to reshape the city to achieve this. Secondly, the 'modern moment' also encompassed technological optimism – Labour believed that through new building techniques and a council-run building force, enough homes could be delivered to the people. For a period in the late 1950s and early 1960s, high-density promised open space in the centre of cities, signifying to progressive planners 'the freeing of the lower classes from the darkness of the slums.'[94] But how did this shift occur within Labour – what were the processes that took Labour from cottage estate to Trellick Tower?

High-density development was not initially a part of post-war Labour planning. Some Labour-controlled councils had built flats in the inter-war years, most notably at Quarry Hill in Leeds, but this would not be renewed to any great extent until the late 1950s.[95] Despite fervently embracing flat-building in the late 1950s, Birmingham Labour Party criticised high-density construction in 1943, stating that 'the average density in central areas should not be allowed to exceed 25 [houses] to the acre.'[96] Given that Abercrombie's London plan had proposed closer to forty houses per acre in central areas, with two-thirds of that population in flats, this seemed optimistic.[97] Indeed, the Communist Party claimed in 1944 that existing cities would 'spread two or three times into the countryside' if suburban-style housing densities were attempted in central areas.[98] Though the Communist assertion was also due to their belief that 'reactionary influences' had made modern flats sound worse than they were, their argument on densities was prescient.[99]

By the mid-1950s, many within Labour became concerned with the lack of building in central urban areas, as well as the advanced decay of much of the

[94] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 42.
[95] Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat', 146. Simon Parker has discussed the LCC's use of flats at the Woodberry Down estate in North London, which built upon an inter-war development in 'From the Slums to the Suburbs: Labour Party Policy, the LCC and the Woodberry Down Estate, Stoke Newington 1934-1961', *London Journal*, 24:2 (1999), 51-69.
[96] LHA, Birmingham Labour Party, *Homes For the People*, 10.
[97] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 220.
[98] LHA, CPGB, *Memorandum on Housing*, 22.
[99] Ibid.

housing. Young claimed in June 1955 that urban dispersal had created 'two nations', arguing that one nation 'lives in modern houses in the suburbs', the other 'in old houses at the centre.'[100] The 1956 policy statement *Homes For The Future* was explicit that if slum areas were to be redeveloped, flats would be required to maintain a community within the existing area.[101] This offered the additional possibility of solving housing shortages more quickly. In a June 1960 LPRD memorandum, it was noted that Bristol City Council believed that they had solved their housing problem, largely through flat building.[102] Similarly, *Towns for Our Times* implied that flats would be utilised to replace 'slums and obsolete twilight areas', alluding to the use of 'modern development.'[103] The turn to central urban areas as the focus of urban transformation was seen as a means of rescuing those from Young's 'old houses' and of forestalling the suburbs. 'If we allow suburban sprawl to continue unchecked,' an LPRD memorandum reflected in 1964, 'we shall end up with a subtopian wasteland where the benefits of both the town and the country have been destroyed.'[104] The former chief architect of West Ham, Ken Lund, reflected in a recent interview that 'with the tall blocks, of twenty-two storeys, you could create around them open space…but when you have two to three storeys, the open space goes you see.'[105] Although the mid-1960s experiments of Neave Brown in low-rise, modernist high-density housing would prove that this assumption was unfounded, in the early 1960s it was the high block that pointed the way to the future.[106] High-density development signified Labour's belief that a modern, socialist utopia would be crafted in an urban rather than a suburban setting.

A 'culture of technological appreciation' was a crucial part of Labour's use of high-density dwellings to transform the urban environment. [107] Many within Labour had a fascination with the use of technology to promote socialist ends, and the relationship of 'science' to modernity in Labour thought will be explored further in Chapter Four. This 'technological appreciation' was also true of the wider Labour movement. In 1950, a pair of building workers visiting the

[100] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (June 1955), 169.
[101] LHA, Labour Party, *Homes For The Future*, 38.
[102] LHA, LPRD Rd/62, Home Policy Sub-Committee, 'Housing: Looking Ahead' (June 1960).
[103] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE/5/7, Labour Party, *Towns For Our Times* (1961), 19.
[104] LHA, LPRD, 'The Quality of Living', 2.
[105] Interview with Ken Lund, Telephone (26 March 2014).
[106] Mark Swenarton, 'Developing a new format for urban housing: Neave Brown and the design of Camden's Fleet Road estate', *The Journal of Architecture*, 17:6 (2012), 973-1007.
[107] Brian Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory: System Building and the Welfare State 1942-74* (London, 1989), 63.

USSR as part of a delegation reported that 'it is a pleasant sight to see modern blocks of flats going up at the back of old wooden houses.'[108] A further delegation in 1952 expressed similar views, with Crosbie M. Hall from the Association of Building Technicians writing that in the USSR 'all the resources of science are used by the building industry.'[109] Hall paid particular attention to the use of pre-cast units in flat building, remarking that a five-storey block of sixty-two flats could be 'built by 200 workmen in 100 days.'[110] Whether or not these flats were still paradigms of scientific socialism after a few years is beside the point – what mattered was that those on the left *believed* that technological development could deliver the modern, socialist future in built form. But it would not be until the latter part of the 1950s that newer building techniques would become more widespread.

In places such as the London borough of West Ham, high-density blocks of flats were built from the late 1940s, but with traditional brick-based methods. However, as the former chief architect of West Ham, Ken Lund, would recount in a 2014 interview, the 'crunch came' in the late 1950s. He suggested that West Ham were 'pressed very hard' by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, with 'serious pressure' to look into 'industrialised' techniques of building – principally 'system' building using prefabricated sections.[111] Saumarez Smith has recently emphasised that this was a Conservative government encouraging this – the slow pace of slum clearance and need to rehouse those whose homes had been demolished made faster building methods an enticing possibility to both of the main parties.[112] Where the parties differed was in what this novel means of creating homes *meant* for their respective urban plans – for Labour, towering, prefabricated blocks signified a new world.

In 1956, the Conservative government had doubled the subsidies on high-rise blocks over six storeys in height from that given per standard house, with the subsidy rising by fixed increment for each additional storey, and this would be retained until 1966.[113] The role of this generous subsidy system in

[108] LHA, British Workers' Delegation, *Russia With Our Own Eyes*, 72.
[109] LHA, British Workers' Delegation, *What We Saw In Russia*, 26.
[110] Ibid., 24.
[111] Interview with Ken Lund, Telephone (26 March 2014).
[112] Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment in Britain', 219.
[113] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, 37.

stimulating high-rise building is not entirely apparent. Finnimore argued that the removal of the progressive height subsidy in 1966 was the 'beginning of the end' for high-rise, whilst Glendinning and Muthesius have pointed out that local authorities could negate subsidy changes in the short term 'by pooling rents or subsidies on existing properties, or by drawing further on rate revenue.'[114] This being said, Glendinning and Muthesius believed that 'subsidy manipulations' by central government had some effect in the late 1960s, though this was accompanied by a general withdrawal of Exchequer funding for local government.[115] It would be reasonable to assert that building costs were not the only driver of enthusiasm for high-rise dwellings. An April 1969 LPRD memorandum examining house building levels claimed that the Conservative takeover of several major local authorities in local elections from 1966 onwards, including Birmingham, had a considerable effect on the slowdown of public building.[116] Significantly, the memorandum also suggested that high interest rates and building society issues had meant a slowdown of private sector construction projects.[117] If the private sector was also suffering from the effects of economic paralysis in the late 1960s, then subsidy withdrawal seems more a symptom than a cause of a reduction in high-rise building. Indeed, Ken Lund remarked that West Ham had used an industrialised 'system' of high-rise blocks licensed in Denmark because it came in cheapest, but pointed to the 1968 collapse of the twenty-two storey block of Ronan Point on the Clever Road estate as a more significant reason for the end of high-rise than a loss of subsidy.[118] Nicholas Bullock has considered the basic failings of the industrialised manner of building, and a change in architectural practice to low-rise, high-density dwellings to have been of equivalent importance.[119] High-rise building for public purposes was already on the way out by the time subsidies were withdrawn.

The new world would, Labour members envisaged, be one built by the hands of free workers. Since 1945, the question of whether the building

[114] Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory*, 181; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 164.
[115] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 175.
[116] LHA, LPRD Re/442, Home Policy Committee, 'The Present Level of New House Building' (April 1969).
[117] Ibid.
[118] Interview with Ken Lund, Telephone (26 March 2014).
[119] Nicholas Bullock, 'West Ham and the Welfare State 1945-70: A Suitable Case for Treatment?' in Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Abingdon, 2015), 93-110 at 103-105.

industry should be under public control or not had been a constant theme of discussion within Labour. In a 1945 pamphlet, Harry Barham claimed that the building industry was inefficient, with labour distributed widely, and that it had begun to amalgamate into larger firms.[120] He recommended the creation of a 'National Building Corporation' under public control, claiming that only under workers' control will 'the motive of service be released, and more bricks laid will mean more houses more quickly.'[121] If Barham's assumption that builders would be more motivated under a nationalised industry was suspect, there was some logic to centralising the labour pool – a National Building Agency would in fact be created by the Conservative government in 1963.[122] However, under the Attlee government, there was no move to create such a body – 'direct labour', through increasing the public works units of local authorities was instead advocated.[123] It would not be until the 1950s that a move would begin within Labour to make a nationalisation of the building industry a policy priority, with votes in favour of doing so failing to pass at the annual conferences of 1950 and 1953.[124] Bevan spoke against the latter vote, arguing that 'if you want to do it, do it, but it does mean the immediate socialisation of the vast number of industries of Great Britain.'[125] The head of the coalition of building unions, the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives (NFBTO), Richard Coppock, was also opposed to a national body in the early 1950s.[126] However, Coppock became increasingly in favour, writing in a December 1956 edition of *Labour's Voice* that 'building as a social service' was only possible under a publically controlled organisation.[127] In a 1961 NFBTO pamphlet, Coppock argued that the enormity of the slum clearance project invited the question 'why not have a publically controlled building force doing the actual work?'[128] This force would, in most cases, end up being a municipal one. Whilst Labour did not take up the idea of a 'National Building Corporation', the party did begin to make heavy use of direct labour. In July 1959, Frank Allaun asserted that the successful building

[120] LHA, LP/328.231, Harry Barham, *Building as a Public Service: A Plan for Reconstruction* (1945), 6-9.
[121] Ibid., 10.
[122] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 190.
[123] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 26.
[124] *LPCR* (1950), 157-162 and *LPCR* (1953), 205-6.
[125] *LPCR* (1953), 205-6.
[126] *LPCR* (1950), 157-162. The NFBTO would voluntarily dissolve in 1971 on the mass merger of building unions to form UCATT.
[127] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Voice* (December 1956), 5.
[128] LHA, LP/328.231, Sir Richard Coppock, *Eye to the Future* (July 1961), 7.

of eleven-storey blocks six months ahead of schedule by Salford's direct labour force exemplified what could be achieved if 'Labour men and trade unionists [have] guts.'[129] By 1966, Labour had amended the law so that local authorities did not have to offer contracts for open competition, enabling direct labour units to commit to continuous industrialised building.[130] This was a significant step – as Shapely, Tanner and Walling have observed, 'direct labour showed that the people – and collectivism – were capable of competing with capitalism.'[131] For Labour, it showed that a modern, socialist urban environment was possible, and it could be built by 'the people.'

The creation of Labour's modern utopia saw ambitiously high targets set for building homes. In a February 1964 edition of *Labour Woman*, the then housing spokesman and MP for Fulham, Michael Stewart, stated that 400,000 homes built per annum would be possible, though 'new methods of building' would be core to it.[132] Indeed, the target would be part of Labour's 1964 general election manifesto later that year, with the party stating that they regarded 400,000 homes as a 'reasonable target', through the use of industrialised building.[133] In an indication of the appeal of industrialised building, the Conservatives also promised 400,000.[134] However, after a year in office, Richard Crossman felt confident that he could increase the target to 500,000 homes per annum. By January 1966, with a general election to be called that year, he was assuring the readers of *Labour Woman* that '500,000 houses a year is only the first step. The 1970's will see even higher targets.'[135] His colleague and close ally Barbara Castle was more sceptical, writing in her diary in November 1966 that it would be impossible to achieve the target of 500,000 houses by 1970, due in part to spending restrictions.[136] In the event, Labour's building programme would peak in 1968, with 414,031 completions in one year.[137] Nonetheless, there was a sense that it *could* be possible, with the technology and socialist desire for modern change. Ken Lund remembered that

[129] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Voice* (July-August 1959), 3.
[130] LHA, *Talking Points* (14 October 1966), 5.
[131] Peter Shapely, Duncan Tanner and Andrew Walling, 'Civic Culture and Housing Policy in Manchester 1945-79', *Twentieth Century British History* 15:4 (2004), 410-434 at 421.
[132] LHA, *Labour Woman* (February 1964), 25.
[133] LHA, LP/GS/1, Labour Party, *Let's Go With Labour For The New Britain* (1964), 15.
[134] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 183.
[135] LHA, *Labour Woman* (January 1966), 4.
[136] Castle, *Castle Diaries 1964-70*, 186.
[137] See Table 1.

> …in the local papers they used to run tables, just like they do in football, on who was building the most houses you see, and it was always West Ham top, with Southwark second… there was always this challenge to try to keep top of the league you see.[138]

The vision of a dynamic urban future combined with a Stakhanovite urge to demolish the old and replace it with the new. Though the modern moment was passing just as Labour finally gained the opportunity to implement their plans nationally, the *prospect* of a complete urban transformation remained vital.

'Life…is becoming more and more complicated, and one cannot leave all the problem's to one's representatives' asserted the introduction to the 1969 Skeffington Report.[139] The 1969 publication of the Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning – more generally known as the Skeffington Report after the committee chair Arthur Skeffington – could be said to have drawn to a close the era of grand projects. Skeffington was MP for Hayes and Harlington and from 1967 to 1970, Private Secretary to the Minister for Housing and Local Government.[140] The Skeffington Committee had been appointed to look into ways by which local communities could contribute to local plans, largely in response to popular reaction against slum clearance schemes. Yet the published report took a cautious line, stating simply that 'opportunity should be provided for discussions with all those involved.'[141] This was still too much for some Labour councillors, and the Skeffington Report was 'greeted with derision' at the 1970 annual conference.[142] Significantly, the Skeffington Report helped create 'a presumption in favour of preservation' – while this will be discussed further in this chapter and in subsequent chapters, in effect this was

[138] Interview with Ken Lund, Telephone (26 March 2014).
[139] *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning (The Skeffington Report)* (2014), first published 1969, 3.
[140] Peter Shapely, 'Introduction' in *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning (The Skeffington Report)* (2014), viii.
[141] *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning (The Skeffington Report)* (2014), 3.
[142] Gyford, *Politics of Local Socialism*, 9.

a presumption in favour of the remaining 'Victorian city.'[143] Nevertheless, the Skeffington Report did not symbolise an end to expert planning – the report concluded with the statement that 'the public should react constructively to the facts and ideas put before them…the preparation of plans…must move on smoothly and with reasonable speed.'[144] It may have marked an end to attempts to create modern, socialist cities of the kind Labour had envisaged throughout much of the post-war period, but this utopian planning was replaced by another form of arcadia. Shapely and Saumarez Smith have both pointed to the continuation of commercially-driven redevelopment schemes as superseding modernist planning.[145] Building upon this theme, Sam Wetherell has traced the commercially-focused Docklands Enterprise Zone of London to a shift in thinking by hitherto-leftist planners such as Peter Hall in the early 1970s. In his words, this saw a tension between state planning and personal autonomy 're-codified as an opposition between the free market and the social democratic consensus.'[146] As the following sections will demonstrate, the realities of the late 1960s made the sweeping away of the last vestiges of the Victorian city in favour of a modern, socialist city seem all the more illusory.

If the thoughts and ideas of those within Labour clearly had an effect on the post-war urban environment, it is nevertheless difficult to identify a fixed urban ideal. Certain characteristics drew together the interpretations of modernity by those within Labour, but this vision was subject to change. Abercrombie's low density vision was not quite the same set of plans as the dazzling high-rise city of the 1960s – nor were either as inspiring as had been hoped. It should be noted, however, that the features which did bind together Labour ideas of modern, socialist transformation had temporal limitations. In spite of the atrophy of the 'modern moment', Labour remained wedded to the grand project until late into the 1960s.[147] As will be discussed in more depth in

[143] Sophie Andreae, 'From comprehensive development to Conservation Areas' in Michael Hunter (eds.), *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, 1996), 135-155, at 141.
[144] *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning (The Skeffington Report)* (2014), 47.
[145] Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment' and Peter Shapely, 'The Entrepreneurial City: The Role of Local Government and City-Centre Redevelopment in Post-War Industrial English Cities', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22:4, (2011), 498-520.
[146] Sam Wetherell, 'Freedom Planned: Enterprise Zones and Urban Non-Planning in Post-War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27:2 (2016), 266-289 at 288,
[147] Some Labour councils were unreceptive to public participation well into the 1970s – see Shapely, *Politics of Housing*.

Chapter Four, this owed much to the fundamental basis of party culture – Labour's urban policy rested on the paternalist assumption that their vision of modernity could deliver what the people wanted, but the task was best left to the party. In matters of policy, there is a conflict between 'the instantaneous advantage to be gained from expedient political decisions and the slow maturation needed for any policy to be effective.'[148] This was especially true in terms of the built environment in the post-war period. Short of the collectivisation of national resources, translating Labour's modern, socialist vision into reality could only be a long, drawn out process.

The People's Commute: Transport and the City

'It is ludicrous,' declared *Towns For Our Times*, 'to keep planning of roads and planning of buildings in separate compartments'[149] While this call to integration might appear a fairly straightforward summary of Labour's post-war urban transport policy, the components and *purpose* of urban transport changed substantively from 1945 to 1970. Transport formed an annex to Labour's modern, socialist planning of the urban environment – although the future shifted between tram, train, bus, motor car and even monorail. It should also be noted that despite being a major form of working-class transport before 1945, the humble bicycle did not feature whatsoever in urban planning. The development of the car as a principal mode of transport has attracted scholarly interest, but the broader history of post-war transport policy and its relation to urban planning has been a limited subject of study.[150] Perhaps this is unsurprising – transport, after all, was no pillar of the welfare state. Although the railways and most bus services were nationalised under the Transport Act 1947, analysis of both forms of transport has proceeded on relatively narrow terms. *Towns For Our Times* went on to advocate the close integration of transport policy with policies for town planning and the distribution of industry, arguing that without this synthesis policy in each area would not succeed.[151]

[148] Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, 82-3.
[149] LSEA, Labour Party, *Towns For Our Times*, 27.
[150] Simon Gunn has suggested that this privileged place accorded to the car derives from sociological interest in the 'car system', or car use as a cultural entity in and of itself. See: Gunn, 'People and the car', 221.
[151] LSEA, Labour Party, *Towns For Our Times*, 38.

Yet why did this not occur in practice? If, as Simon Gunn suggests, modernism saw British cities 'reconstructed to accommodate mass automobility', what part did Labour play in this?[152] Questioning why public transport lost out in an age in which 'rational', modern planning was paramount can assist in understanding the significance of 'mass automobility' in shaping the city.

A connection between urban transport policy and urban planning had remained constant in Labour thought from early in the party's history. As a party representing mass transport workers, whether bus, railway or tram, Labour had an interest in maintaining a functioning public transport system. The late nineteenth-century 'gas and water socialism' of numerous municipalities in Britain had in some cases extended to ownership of public transport. In his 1913 pamphlet *Eight-Pound Cottages*, John Wheatley planned to use the profits of the Glasgow Tramway Department to build his eight-pound cottages.[153] Wheatley justified his use of tramway funds by the fact that poorer citizens were tram-users, asserting that the rich 'must be prevented from putting a finger into this poor man's purse.'[154] In an era of urban expansion, the working classes were becoming commuters, particularly within London.[155] The 1918 Tudor Walters Report emphasised that local authorities should phase house-building plans in with tramway development.[156] Similarly, the Labour-controlled LCC aimed to ensure 'a rapid and cheap means of locomotion' in the planning of their 'out-country' housing estates, but this often did not occur.[157] The tram was gradually superseded by the bus throughout the inter-war period, due to the belief that buses would ease traffic congestion.[158] Herbert Morrison had attempted to rationalise bus services through limiting competition as Minister of Transport in the 1929-31 Labour government, and additionally initiated a bill to create a public London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB).[159]

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[152] Gunn, 'People and the car', 236.
[153] LHA, Wheatley, *Eight-Pound Cottages*, 6.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Simon T. Abernethy, 'Opening up the suburbs: workmen's trains in London 1860–1914', *Urban History* (2015), 42:1, 70-88.
[156] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 68.
[157] Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-Class Housing in England between the Wars: The Becontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997), 22-23.
[158] Pooley and Turnbull, 'Commuting, transport and urban form'. Pooley and Turnbull note that trams remained prominent in Glasgow for far longer than elsewhere, due to consistent corporation investment in the service, as well as due to popularity amongst commuters.
[159] Philip Bagwell and Peter Lyth, *Transport in Britain: From Canal Lock to Gridlock* (London, 2002), p.109. Morrison's bill was carried into effect by the National Government in 1933, and Morrison, as leader of the LCC Labour group was able to make full use of it when Labour won control of the LCC in 1934.

The inter-war preference of the LCC and other Labour-controlled councils for suburban housing estates made good transport imperative.[160]

In spite of the attention paid to transport, high fares and long commuting times alongside higher rents for council homes concerned some observers, with several inter-war sociological studies arguing that this combination was a key factor in causing tenants to leave peripheral estates.[161] Indeed, Jevons and Madge would conclude in their study of 'out-country' estates in Bristol that there was a pressing 'need for less segregation of estates from the life of the city as a whole.'[162] Labour's opponents on the left held similar views. In a 1938 Communist pamphlet, Ted Bramley decried the 'misery of queuing up, fighting for bus or tram in the pouring rain' before returning to one's home.[163] He continued this theme in a 1945 publication, claiming that 'to build houses in such a way as to isolate people unduly from the community is a crime.'[164] Nonetheless, as Orwell observed in a similar manner to Priestley, the 'germs of the future England' were to be found in those suburbs pioneered by 'cheap motor cars.'[165] This was especially true of the south and midlands, though car journeys only represented in total 9.1% of journeys to work by 1939, with the train and bicycle only narrowly outstripped by walking.[166] This would rapidly change in the decades after 1945, as the 'cheap motor car' became still cheaper, and the possibilities of motorised modernity grew.

Some indication of Labour's post-war thinking on transport could be seen in a 1943 Birmingham Labour Party pamphlet, in which the party stated their desire for 'at least one satellite town.'[167] Birmingham Labour put particular emphasis on the building of 'suitable highways', though they went on to suggest that 'probably a fast electric railway service would be desirable.'[168] This being said, the New Town concept explicitly aimed to provide self-contained communities. Through the post-war nationalisation of transport services,

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[160] Olechnowicz, *Working-Class Housing in England*, 2.
[161] Rosamond Jevons and John Madge, *Housing Estates: A Study of Bristol Corporation Policy and Practice Between the Wars* (Bristol, 1946); Ruth Durant, *Watling: A Social Survey* (London, 1939).
[162] Jevons and Madge, *Housing Estates*, 89.
[163] LHA, Bramley, *New London*, 27.
[164] LHA, LP/362.5/319, CPGB, Ted Bramley, *Lights on London: The Battle for Homes* (1945), 50-51.
[165] George Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius' in George Orwell, *Essays* (London, 2000), first published 1941, 63-158 at 158.
[166] Pooley and Turnbull, 'Commuting, transport and urban form', 366.
[167] LHA, Birmingham Labour Party, *Homes For the People*, 13.
[168] Ibid.

Labour had considerable scope to achieve this.[169] In point of fact, though the later New Towns would adopt a more car-centric model, the original settlements were not motor cities. Indeed, a 1942 party report on urban planning stated that post-war construction should provide 'well-planned homes near to modern efficient works and factories.'[170] A comparable sentiment was evident in a 1943 publication by the National Council of Social Service, which recommended that 'most people should be able to live within about fifteen minutes' door-to-door travel from their work by bus, tram or cycle.'[171] This vision assumed that persons and employment could easily be sited with reach of one another. While this could and did occur initially in the first wave of New Towns, as the previous section has discussed, this situation did not last. Mark Clapson has suggested that 'transportation technology was the vehicle for, not the cause of, the suburban dream', arguing that the motor car facilitated wider suburbanisation on the back of a popular 'aspiration' to live in the suburbs.[172] It is important to note that this was not a foregone conclusion. Car ownership did not begin its dramatic rise until the mid-1950s, tripling from 4.4 million in 1950 to 13 million in 1965.[173] For Labour, the urban experience remained principally one of Hoggart's romanticised childhood – one in which 'motor-cars seldom penetrated', trams remained the 'gondolas of the people' and the charabanc held its place as king of the road.[174]

In a September 1954 *Socialist Commentary* article on Harlow New Town, the author claimed that no one was 'more than twelve minutes by bicycle from his place of work', with 'fully used' and 'deservedly popular' cycle tracks enabling quick movement around the town.[175] A further piece on Harlow in the following issue by George Thomson, MP for Dundee East, also commented on the cycle tracks, with factories 'only a few minutes from the workers' doors', contrasting this with 'exhausting, overcrowded tube journeys' made by the same workers when they had lived in London.[176] In both cases, the impression was

[169] Bagwell and Lyth, *Transport in Britain*, 127-8.
[170] LHA, LPRD Rdr/55, Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee, 'Preliminary Report of the Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee' (January 1942), 5.
[171] LSE Archives, Shore Papers, SHORE/5/7, National Council of Social Service, *Size and Social Structure of a Town* (1943), 11.
[172] Mark Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the United States* (Oxford, 2003), 51.
[173] Gunn, 'People and the car', 224.
[174] Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 120-1.
[175] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (September 1954), 254.
[176] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (October 1954), 289.

that the car did not seem to be as present in the New Towns as might have been expected. This being said, it is evident that the provision of urban transport within New Towns was not always consistent. In an August 1956 piece for *Labour Woman* on the New Town of Peterlee it was noted that 'there is a need for a better transport service – more buses in all directions.'[177] The failure to provide effective bus and other transport services had the effect of making the car seem a more attractive option by the later 1950s and early 1960s.[178] This was more of a gradual than dramatic shift, though the impact of the private car began to interest observers as the 1950s wore on. A June 1959 article on reconstructed Coventry remarked approvingly on the 'inner circulating traffic route' formed around the pedestrian shopping area of the city centre and its preservation of pedestrian access 'in the face of modern traffic.'[179] By the late 1950s, traffic levels had become a key concern for planners. Gunn argues that the main fear of planners was that traffic congestion could cause inner city decay as had been thought to have occurred in the USA.[180] However, reshaping 'out-of-date' cities was thought to be the solution, rather than controlling urban transport more closely. The process of transforming the urban environment would involve embracing the car, whether Labour wanted to or not.

Urban congestion had taken its place as a new 'evil' of Beveridgean proportions by the early 1960s. In January 1961, an LPRD report on planning noted that commuting by car had overtaken public transport, with the result that cities were being 'throttled by traffic jams.'[181] The result of these deliberations, *Towns For Our Times*, went on to contend that traffic was not 'an inevitable evil to be endured along with wet summers and the common cold.'[182] *Towns For Our Times* also warned against giving the car a 'completely free run' as had happened in America, suggesting that urban motorways should be carefully planned if introduced.[183] A May 1961 pamphlet by Britain's Buses (comprising all the major bus companies) sounded a similar note, arguing that rebuilding of cities with urban motorways on a large scale was 'not practical here, nor do

[177] LHA, *Labour Woman* (August 1956), 118.
[178] Colin G. Pooley, Jean Turnbull and Mags Adams, *A Mobile Century: Changes in Everyday Mobility in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 2005), 130.
[179] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (June 1959), 6.
[180] Gunn, 'The Buchanan Report', 523.
[181] LHA, LPRD Rd/103, Home Policy Sub-Committee, 'Planning and the Community Draft Pamphlet', (January 1961), 10.
[182] LSEA, Labour Party, *Towns For Our Times*, 5.
[183] Ibid., 27.

more than a few people really want it.'[184] Britain's Buses instead recommended the creation of fast bus lanes to solve the problem.[185] The *Socialist Commentary* report 'Face of Britain' continued this theme, recommending the development of cities into a series of pedestrian communities, connected by public transport, whilst road planning would come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.[186] All of these pieces implied that the advance of the car had to be carefully managed, if not actually arrested. Though this was certainly possible, it did require a conscious bias towards public transport and some means of encouraging the public to do likewise. The likelihood of this actually occurring in Labour policy whether locally or following their return to government in 1964 seemed unlikely.

At the local level in Labour-controlled Bradford, Gunn has shown that those within Labour were attracted to the brash modernism of the City Engineer Stanley Wardley, whose urban motorway system, pedestrian subways and car parks built from the late 1950s onwards were 'the most visible embodiment of the post-war city as a networked infrastructure.'[187] This network did not privilege public transport, rather individual road traffic. Equally, Bradford's transformation was entirely in keeping with the principles of the published 1963 Buchanan Report, *Traffic In Towns*. The product of a committee headed by the town planner Colin Buchanan, the report argued for a new 'traffic architecture', which would require nothing less than the total reconstruction of cities.[188] Though the Buchanan Report was not solely responsible for the building of urban motorways in Britain, it certainly promoted the view that the most modern response to the car was to rebuild the city to accommodate it.

Many socialist observers remained highly critical of the move to a car-centric urban environment. A March 1962 *Socialist Commentary* article argued that based on the author's experiences of North America, planners in Britain should not attempt to 'provide highways and parking spaces for all automotive comers', but rather should increase public transport.[189] More esoterically, a letter-writer to *Tribune* in September 1962 argued that 'modern technology has

[184] LSE Archives, Shore Papers, SHORE/4/32, Britain's Buses, *The Bus and the Community* (1961), 4.
[185] Ibid.
[186] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'The Face of Britain' (September 1961), xviii-xix.
[187] Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism', 858.
[188] Gunn, 'The Buchanan Report', 530-531.
[189] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1962), 21.

created the means…to *break up* our monstrous cities…'[190] In the view of the contributor, a move to smaller communities would make congestion planning unnecessary, though it should be noted they were from the small town of Christchurch in Dorset – hardly a paradigm of urban experience.[191] As it would happen, North America had seen substantial urban reactions to the car. The activist Jane Jacobs led protests against urban motorway construction in late-1950s New York City, most notably defeating the city planner Robert Moses' scheme for a 'Lower Manhattan Expressway' through Greenwich Village. However, Jacobs was more meditative than might have been imagined on the subject of the car, writing that though traffic was a 'powerful and insistent' force changing the city, 'we blame automobiles for too much.'[192] Jacobs argued that the problem was less the fact that cars existed, but rather that the 'orthodox planning' of the period demonstrated 'sheer disrespect for other city needs, uses and functions.'[193] Air pollution was a major factor in reactions to the car: one June 1962 writer in *Socialist Commentary* lamented in the fact that the 1956 Clean Air Act was being systematically undone by the fumes emitted from vehicle exhausts.[194] There was some irony in modernity simply replacing one form of smog for another. The author of the article went on to hold up Los Angeles as an example of 'when the motor vehicle gets the upper hand on human beings', but criticised Labour for doing little about car pollution.[195] There was an environmental impetus to public transport, though Labour were slower to formulate policy on this element.

Finding a public transport solution to the problems raised by the car was not easy. In his analysis of the proposals for 'North Bucks New City, Guy Ortalano noted that the rail links, traffic calming measures and even monorail of the hyper-modern plans nonetheless 'acknowledged the inevitability of a future of cars, even as [the planner] sought to make cars unnecessary in his own future city.'[196] 'North Bucks New City' was to be rejected by the MHLG in 1965, in favour of the New Town of Milton Keynes, consciously designed as an American-style motor city.[197] This theme was also present in a paper presented

[190] LSEA, *Tribune* (7 September 1962), 9.
[191] LSEA, *Tribune* (7 September 1962), 9.
[192] Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 338.
[193] Ibid., 339.
[194] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (June 1962), 11.
[195] Ibid., 12-13.
[196] Ortalano, 'Planning the Urban Future', 506.
[197] Ibid., 499-505.

by the civil engineer Chaceley T. Humpidge at a meeting of the Public Transport Association, an industry body.[198] Humpidge suggested that increased car use was a problem for public transport, but recommended urban motorways and higher-level roads connected to multi-storey car parks, 'thus keeping roads at normal level mainly for buses.'[199] An April 1963 *Socialist Commentary* report on transport, written by Peter Hall and D.L. Munby, reflected that the 'traditional Socialist answer' of integrated planning was a 'universal panacea' with it being wrong in their view to treat transport as a social service akin to education.[200] The report argued that traffic congestion measures were flawed, as they enabled city engineers to believe that 'all road space is potential traffic space.'[201] However, the report still advocated the 'motorisation' of cities, with congestion charging to fund public transport.[202] Though the idea of congestion charging had clear merit, there seemed little thought as to whether this form of modernity might have conflicted with other Labour desires for the urban environment.

In a pamphlet responding to the far-reaching 1963 Beeching Report, which closed urban railways as well as rural branch lines, Labour argued that the report showed a 'complete disregard' for the role of public transport in the 'modern city.'[203] Conversely, a 1964 report by a party study group on urban traffic suggested that demand for urban rail outside of London was 'minimal', meaning that road services had to be improved to ensure efficient bus use.[204] The report instead focused on monorail as an 'advanced transportation system.' Such enthusiasm for new technology was perhaps unsurprising, given that the chairman of the study group was Tony Benn, MP for Bristol South-East – then a junior transport spokesman and a keen moderniser.[205] His enthusiasm was not always reciprocated by his colleagues. Benn recorded in his diary in June 1960 that a demonstration of a Ford 'Levacar' – a form of monorail – was attended by

[198] This was the forerunner to the present day Confederation of British Road Passenger Transport.
[199] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE 4/32, Chaceley T. Humpidge, 'Public Transport Priority' (1963), 13-14.
[200] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'Transport is Everyone's Problem' (April 1963), xi-xii.
[201] Ibid., xxvii.
[202] Ibid., xxxvii.
[203] LHA, *Talking Points* (1964), 5.
[204] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE 4/32, LPRD, Urban Traffic Congestion Study Group, 'Urban Transport' (July 1964), 1.
[205] Ibid.

only one MP and some 'stick in the mud' transport engineers.[206] Nonetheless, one evolving technology *was* promoted over all others – the car. Labour's modern, socialist thinking was in this regard 'aggressively engaged with the new.'[207] Public transport was uneasily situated within a challenging new, motorised urban world, as cities were reconstructed to reflect this new reality.

The legislative response of Labour to the issues of urban transport did not take shape until 1968, with the introduction of a new Transport Act. This was in part due to the complexity of the system that Labour found themselves with in 1964. The Tories had semi-privatised the bus and rail services nationalised by Labour, as well as wholly privatising road haulage. Barbara Castle would write in her diary in February 1968 that the attempt to pass the Transport Bill faced both the industrial lobby, opposed to nationalisation, as well as the unions, opposed to potential pay restrictions.[208] The 1968 Act established Passenger Transport Authorities in major cities outside of London, in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle, allowing these cities to plan their transport systems on similar lines to the capital.[209] Yet as Philip Bagwell and Peter Lyth have observed, whilst this represented a development from *Traffic In Towns*, there was a hesitancy to limit urban car use.[210] Indeed, whilst *Socialist Commentary* commended the Act for bringing urban transport until local authority control as a part of town planning, it is difficult not to see this as too little, too late.[211] In spite of this, if urban modernism was reaching its high water mark by the late 1960s, those cities that had motorised themselves still stood as examples of the future. Indeed, Anthony Sutcliffe and Roger Smith asserted in 1974 that 'Birmingham's gleaming new buildings and roads made a striking contrast with many less prosperous cities.'[212] The consequences for those who did not benefit from the new roads was stated in a 1970 *Socialist Commentary* piece, which claimed that a 'silent majority' of public transport users were disadvantaged by transport policy.[213] Gunn has commented that Labour were committed to public transport over the car, but in committing to

[206] Tony Benn (edited by Ruth Winstone), *Years of Hope: Diaries, Letters and Papers 1940-1962* (London, 1994), 332.
[207] Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 49.
[208] Castle, *Castle Diaries 1964-70*, 372.
[209] Bagwell and Lyth, *Transport in Britain*, 204.
[210] Ibid.
[211] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1968), 8.
[212] Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham*, 479.
[213] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1970), 5.

policies that significantly developed urban roadways, he suggests that 'the seeming unrelenting imperative for road space' won out.[214]

In spite of the better intentions of urban planners, this impulse continues in the present day. With the designation of Bicester as a new 'garden city' by the Coalition government in 2014, some residents criticised the decision due to already existing traffic issues, regarding any development as inevitably car-centric.[215] In seeking to reconstruct the city on rational, modern lines, Labour were likely to be amenable to any proposal to overhaul 'obsolete' cities. Though the party saw public transport as the solution, they did not recognise that an urban architecture of urban motorways, wider roads and junctions would encourage car use as much as it would bus use – though it should be stated that Labour were no different to the majority of planners in the period. In striving for a modern urban transformation of British cities through the pursuit of urban roadways, Labour set in place the conditions for urban sprawl to continue unabated.

Labouring the Land: Labour and the politics of land control

'At the heart of nearly all town planning problems,' the authors of the 1961 'Face of Britain' planning report remarked, 'lies the question of the land.'[216] Labour's relationship with the politics of land control is integral to understanding the party's modern, transformative urban aims. Those within Labour were inclined to view future urban development as something that ought to be closely planned. For this to take place, a high degree of state control over the supply of land would be required, though Labour were fixated on agriculture in their use of the term 'land'.[217] This lack of separation between rural policy and land policy as a whole hampered discussion of land nationalisation: *urban* land was rarely mentioned. Policy on land put forward also addressed a practical issue in urban development – namely, should state-led projects be hindered by private ownership and high land prices? Equally, for Labour, the question of what sort

[214] Gunn, 'The Buchanan Report', 538.
[215] *The Guardian* (2 December 2014) accessed online 15 March 2015 http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/dec/02/bicester-residents-fear-garden-city-plan-will-put-strain-on-local-services
[216] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'Face of Britain' (September 1961), xix.
[217] Clare Griffiths, 'Socialism and the Land Question: Public Ownership and Control in Labour Party Policy, 1918-1950s' in Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (eds.), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke, 2010), 237-256 at 240-241.

of policy land should be controlled under remained an open one. There remained a tension between public ownership – generally expressed as nationalisation or legislation – and forms of land taxation throughout the period 1945-70. Labour's discussion of the merits of land control challenged the party's radical self-identity – if the party wished to take away the power of 'landlords', this theoretically had to apply to all landholders. The politics of land control are revealing both of the pressures building upon urban planning from the 1950s onwards, and of the difficulties faced by Labour in realising modern, socialist aims for the urban environment.

The 1937 party programme listed nationalisation as second of 'four vital measures of reconstruction.'[218] In spite of this, public ownership of land was not pursued by the Attlee government and instead greater development powers were afforded to local authorities in the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. The removal of land nationalisation as a 'vital measure' has led scholars to conclude that Labour did not take the subject seriously. Clare Griffiths has suggested that land nationalisation was gradually moved out of Labour's focus after non-implementation in 1945, with a brief re-appearance in 1960 in comments by Hugh Gaitskell.[219] In fact, the subject was 'live' within the party in the early 1950s, and remained prominent until the late 1960s, with the introduction of the 'Land Commission' to buy up development land. Peter Weiler has argued that the 'Land Commission' was an ideological rallying point, a 'continued hope for a new moral world.' [220] In fact, it was *both* a rallying point and a pragmatic recognition that large-scale planning was difficult without land control. As Crosland noted in 1962, 'land is not an ordinary commodity, to be bought and sold like toothpaste or detergent', as it affected far more people than the purchaser. [221] In this respect, Labour's attempt to bring land under public control was as much about a planning quandary as it was about the party's modern aims.

The politics of the 'land question' had a long history and land agitation can be dated back to the Chartist movement of the 1840s.[222] However, the

[218] Ibid., 247.
[219] Ibid., 252.
[220] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 343.
[221] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 183.
[222] Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, 'Introduction', in Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (eds.), *The Land Question in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2010), 1-18 at 3. Debate over land rights in Britain is still older. Indeed, one could reasonably see the Levellers and Diggers of the English Civil War as promoting a form of 'public ownership' of land.

urban element of the 'land question' began to take shape at the turn of the twentieth century, as overcrowding in British cities seemed to suggest to Liberal Party reformers that land controls would solve the slum problem.[223] Attempts by the Liberals to impose land value taxation during the 1906-10 government failed and land reform as a single issue – removing land from the control of great landowners – fractured into several connected subjects.[224] In his 1913 pamphlet, Wheatley remarked that German cities had wide-ranging powers over the land, as they 'recognise the controlling influence of the land on the life of the community.'[225] The 'land question' encompassed the challenges of urbanisation, as well as reversing the deterioration of rural life and confronting the power of the landed classes.[226]

Nevertheless, land reform remained an *agricultural* point of contention for Labour throughout most of the inter-war period: greater state supervision of land was about improving the lot of the lowly tenant farmer, as well as ensuring urban workers had a constant supply of butter for their bread.[227] This did not preclude moves towards full public ownership of land, with the 1932 party document *The Land and the National Planning of Agriculture* making the 'obviously socialist' declaration that agricultural planning required land control.[228] Labour's growing interest in 'town and country planning' marked a shift towards land nationalisation. The policy began to be presented as a 'functional solution', though primarily in agricultural terms. Its inclusion in the 1937 *Immediate Programme* was based on a rural understanding of the need for land reform, with some recourse to town planning. [229]

The crucial factor in changing the terms of the debate from a pastoral to an urban focus was the Second World War. During the war, the Uthwatt Committee assessed the possibility of post-war land speculation, recommending local authority compulsory purchase powers for land in post-war planning in their 1942 report, with compensation at the value of the land on 31 March 1939. [230] As the first section of this chapter has discussed, the ambitious

[223] Ibid, 12-13.
[224] Michael Tichelar, 'The Labour Party and Land Reform in the Inter-War Period', *Rural History* (2002), 13:1, 85-101 at 85.
[225] LHA, Wheatley, *Eight-Pound Cottages*, 6.
[226] Tichelar, 'The Labour Party and Land Reform', 85.
[227] Ibid., 89-91.
[228] Griffiths, 'Socialism and the Land Question', 241.
[229] Ibid., 246.
[230] Roy Douglas, *Land, People and Politics: A History of the Land Question in the United Kingdom 1878-1952* (London, 1976), 210-211.

reconstruction plans of wartime councils required some form of land control. Land controls were therefore 'a pragmatic answer…to the urban and suburban challenges of post-war rebuilding.'[231] In the event, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act did *not* contain provisions for land nationalisation, instead focusing on taxation of land development value and offering low levels of compensation for compulsory purchase. Crucially, *nationalisation* lost favour, rather than the notion of controls.

The wartime shift within Labour to seeing land controls as pragmatic urban policy was indicative of party interest in comprehensive planning. In a 1942 party report on housing, it was suggested that without land control, 'planning cannot even begin to be effective.'[232] In spite of this, the report argued that immediate post-war land nationalisation at 1939 values was an 'extravagant method' of taking control of land.[233] According to Michael Tichelar, the wartime coalition could not agree a price restriction for compulsory purchase of land in post-war reconstruction. Given he claimed that Labour refused to compromise over the 1939 value as the basis for compensation during 1944 negotiations, it is surprising that internally the party were inclined to moderation.[234] It raises the question whether Labour had a more complex view of public ownership than most accounts of the period suggest. Indeed, in the same 1942 report alternatives to land nationalisation were listed, with municipal ownership being seen as a preferred option to 'permanent ownership pooling.' The latter method involved the local authority in question compulsorily purchasing all land, re-planning the area in full and handing back new plots to the owners. Alongside the obvious potential for dissent from disgruntled landowners under this method, the authors of the report felt that local authorities were comparatively 'strong candidates for the job of owner', as long as they didn't 'make a principle of it.'[235] Pragmatically, the apparent costs of land nationalisation meant that local authorities believed that they were better placed to compensate landowners on a case-by-case basis.[236]

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[231] Griffiths, 'Socialism and the Land Question', 250.
[232] LHA, Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee, 'Preliminary Report', 3.
[233] Ibid., 8.
[234] Michael Tichelar, 'The Conflict over Property Rights during the Second World War: The Labour Party's Abandonment of Land Nationalization', *Twentieth Century British History* 14:2 (2003), 165-188 at 167.
[235] LHA, Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee, 'Preliminary Report', 8-9.
[236] Tichelar, 'The Conflict over Property Rights', 188.

Labour committed themselves to land nationalisation in their 1945 manifesto, but took a different path on taking government. As noted, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act formed the party's statement on land, with limited compensation for land compulsorily purchased by local authorities.[237] In addition, a development charge of one hundred per cent was to be paid to the state on all land that gained in value through planning measures.[238] Critiquing these proposals in his 1945 pamphlet, Douglas Brown suggested that in the absence of land nationalisation, the great landowners were 'carrying on a guerrilla war against the post-war plans for reconstruction.'[239] Moreover, the fragmentation of planning policy between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning made a coherent approach less likely.[240] Discretion seemed to guide Labour land policy under the Attlee government. In a February 1948 report on planning, it was suggested that 'there are powerful arguments against nationalisation until the new system has been given a fair trial.'[241] However, the report went on to suggest that the issue should 'lie dormant until at least 1953.'[242] The hope that Labour would still be in government in 1953 proved optimistic – and the debate on land policy heightened in opposition.

1953 instead saw a debate carried over the pages of the Labour newspaper *Forward* on the relative merits of land nationalisation and land value taxation. Advocating land nationalisation was the former MP for Wellingborough George Dallas, and his opponent Richard Stokes, the MP for Ipswich. Stokes asserted that to nationalise all urban and rural land would cost 'not less than £20,000,000,000!' in compensation, using tax money to pay off landlords.[243] He argued that Labour should instead 'make the landlords pay for the privilege of ownership' through land value taxation.[244] Stokes' proposal was in some ways a more radical evolution of the development charge, which had been abolished by the Conservative government in 1952.[245] This abolition had put pressure on urban councils attempting to build outside of existing city

[237] Davis, 'Macmillan's martyr', 134.
[238] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 133.
[239] LHA, Brown, *An Englishman's Home*, 16.
[240] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 67.
[241] LHA, LPRD Rd/220, Social Services Sub-Committee, 'Town and Country Planning' (February 1948), 1.
[242] Ibid.
[243] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Forward* (29 Aug 1953), 1.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Davis, 'Macmillan's martyr', 131.

boundaries – Shapely has noted the difficulty Manchester faced in trying to gain land from landowners in Cheshire and the county council.[246] Some within Labour still saw discussions on land as an agricultural matter. A 1958 pamphlet by Harry Walston and John Mackie explicitly discussed farming land, making no mention even of New Towns – though given that both authors were farmers, perhaps this was to be expected.[247] The problems that Manchester and other large cities had encountered began to renew interest in land, as those within Labour felt that there should be some means of providing land to councils who needed it. Yet the solution remained centred on the taxation of land values as a means of keeping prices low, though there were clearly limitations to land taxation without ownership. Daunton has suggested that the 1947 Act represented a sort of halfway house: it had given the state right to develop land, but not a monopoly of land purchases.[248] Indeed, Labour would state in *Towns For Our Times* that 'policies of land ownership cannot be divorced from policies of land use', but went on to recommend, in effect, an updated form of the 1947 Act.[249] In this regard, Labour attempts to modify its 1947 policy, rather than considering the idea of public ownership more seriously, were unlikely to achieve their ambitious, modern aims.

Writing in a September 1960 edition of *Labour's Voice*, John Mackie, now MP for Enfield East, argued that whilst the 1947 Act was a 'brave effort to control the land – it was far too complicated…and far too easily dismantled.'[250] Mackie upheld public ownership as the most effective means of taking control of urban land. Labour had begun to attack the Conservative government for allowing speculators to drive up the price of land in cities, with this situation heightened by the building of office blocks.[251] This had been partly fuelled by the 1959 Town and Country Planning Act, which obliged local authorities to pay market rates for compulsorily purchased properties.[252] Frank Allaun claimed in 1962 that the average flat cost £500 before bricks had even been laid due to high land prices, and he asserted that this reality meant a Labour government would have to adhere to the ''Socialist principle' of public ownership of all

[246] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 136-137.
[247] LSEA, Fabian Society, FABIAN/312, Harry Walston and John Mackie, *Land Nationalisation: For and Against* (1958), 242.
[248] Daunton, *Just Taxes*, 350-1.
[249] LSEA, Labour Party, *Towns for Our Times*, 37.
[250] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Voice* (September 1960), 3.
[251] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 134-6.
[252] Davis, 'Macmillan's martyr', 139.

land.'[253] Conversely, the 1961 policy publication *Signposts for the Sixties* had quoted John Stuart Mill's advocacy of public control of building land, arguing 'we are concerned here only with land which is either needed for public use or on which it is proposed that private building or rebuilding should be permitted.'[254] Whilst this prudence was politically understandable, it threatened to complicate the land situation rather than resolve it.

In *Signposts for the Sixties*, Labour proposed the creation of a Land Commission to buy up all development land, releasing the land at preferential prices to both public and private sectors.[255] The policy was relatively successful: professional bodies such as Town and Country Planning Association and Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors came on board, with Labour rhetoric buoyed by public anger at 'speculators.'[256] However, the concept of a Land Commission did not escape criticism, with the 'Face of Britain' report in September 1961 suggesting instead that a Labour government should acquire the freehold of *all* land, which they described as a 'bold and far-reaching measure.'[257] The authors of the report argued that their plan would limit ambiguities through encompassing 'all land at the same time.'[258] Counter to this, the LPRD remarked in their own assessment of the 'Face of Britain' that 'it does not seem to us that the fact that large areas fall into public ownership together necessarily achieves anything.'[259] Similarly, Lord Silkin suggested to a study group on land in April 1962 that development value would have to be compensated for, as 'any other basis for compensation would contain a confiscatory element, which we could only justify on the basis that we were trying to recover for the community something which the community had itself created.'[260] Having experienced difficulties himself when Minister of Town and Country Planning in the Attlee government, Silkin seemed anxious that Labour should not go too far in their proposals. But his objection was exactly the reason upon which those supporting public ownership justified themselves – land was regarded as belonging to the community, not to the individual. The

[253] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Frank Allaun, *Britain's Housing Tragedy - and how to end it* (1962), 7.
[254] LHA, Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties*, 20.
[255] Ibid.
[256] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 139-140.
[257] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'Face of Britain' (September 1961), xx.
[258] Ibid., xxii.
[259] LHA, LPRD Rd/189, 'The *Socialist Commentary* Land Ownership Proposals: A comparison with Labour's scheme' (December 1961).
[260] LHA, LPRD Rd/244, Study Group on Land Problems, 'Memorandum by the Rt. Hon Lord Silkin, P.C.' (April 1962).

North Kensington Labour Party had stated in early 1962 that 'all urban land should belong to the community; but it should be leased to private developers.'[261] Similarly, whilst arguing for the Land Commission, Michael Stewart claimed that private land 'hampers the building of houses, schools, hospitals.'[262] Taking control of the land without paying generous compensation to landholders reflected Labour attitudes to the injustices of the urban environment – the problem was as much one of greed as supply.

The Land Commission aimed to stimulate house-building by ending the land shortages most local authorities suffered from. An October 1965 edition of *Talking Points* described the Land Commission as playing 'a major role in reshaping our towns for modern living', through enabling the allocation of land where needed.[263] Equally, it was intended to stall the advance of 'subtopia', described in 1963 by the soon-to-be MP for Lewisham Deptford John Silkin as 'one of the platitudes of political life.'[264] But the Land Commission faced opposition from the start. Following the Labour victory in 1964, Crossman obstructed the new organisation, fearing that planning powers would be removed from his Ministry of Housing and Local Government.[265] In this he was correct – Fred Willey, MP for Sunderland North, was appointed 'Minister of Land', and the new ministry would take planning departments from Crossman's own.[266] Crossman wrote in his diary in late 1964 that he feared the Land Commission would do little more than 'gum up the works and destroy any chance of building the houses we would require.'[267] This being said, Barbara Castle asserted that Crossman believed the Land Commission to be an attempt by Dame Evelyn Sharp, his civil service nemesis, to weaken his housing programme.[268] It is difficult to discern what Crossman believed would be an appropriate land policy, but his opposition ensured that the 'Ministry of Land' merged into the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, rather than vice versa.[269] When a much-reduced Land Commission was eventually created in February 1967, the task of buying up land proved difficult. Only 1780 acres of

[261] LHA, North Kensington Labour Party, 'Conclusions of a Study Group on Housing'.
[262] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (January 1962), 1.
[263] LHA, *Talking Points* (29 October 1965), 2.
[264] LSEA, *Tribune* (14 June 1963), 7. Silkin was the son of Lord Lewis Silkin, and became MP for Lewisham Deptford in a by-election in July 1963.
[265] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 142.
[266] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 338.
[267] Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 101.
[268] Castle, *Castle Diaries 1964-70*, 16.
[269] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 338-9.

land had been bought by 1970 and the popular press cited the Pilgrim case of the 1950s – in which a toolmaker had committed suicide due to poor compensation – as an example of why land controls were unjust.[270] Indeed, an April 1969 party report on housing policy suggested that 'although the Land Commission is now beginning to justify its existence, there is still some suspicion that it is becoming a political liability.'[271] Tellingly, a section described how another form of opposition had dampened its effectiveness – local authorities refusing to give up their land to the Land Commission.[272] In a further memorandum from 1969, Arthur Skeffington, suggested that 'a strategic land use planning unit' ought to be set up in concert with the Land Commission, yet this would still require local authority support.[273] Given the opposition, both bureaucratic and otherwise, it would seem that the Land Commission was as 'easily dismantled' as the 1947 Act had been. It may, perhaps, have been more effective to bring all land under public control.

In a May 1967 edition of *Labour Woman*, Tony Greenwood described the Land Commission as having been formed to curb 'one of the most gross forms of exploitation', that of the *rentier* capitalist.[274] Yet by the end of the decade, there was still no straightforward means by which local authorities could gain the land they needed for their urban plans. Poignantly, the Land Commission was broken up by Conservatives following their election victory in 1970.[275] Peter Weiler has claimed that the Land Commission was consigned to an 'Orwellian memory hole', with no mention of it by Labour in the 1970 general election.[276] For all its flaws, the Land Commission reflected the pressures on urban redevelopment in the 1960s. It epitomised the dilemma faced by Labour in enacting the party's modern plans – how far should they go in seeking a modern, socialist transformation of the urban environment? Should landholders be taxed, regulated or abolished entirely? On the question of the land, Labour left the structure of the past intact – the 'great landowners' that Brown had spoken of were free to continue their guerrilla war against the march of modernity.

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[270] Davis, 'Macmillan's martyr', 140.
[271] LHA, Housing Policy Study Group, 'Draft Report'.
[272] Ibid.
[273] LHA, LPRD Re/498, Housing Policy Study Group, Arthur Skeffington MP, 'Strategic Land Use Planning' (July 1969).
[274] LHA, *Labour Woman* (May 1967), 87.
[275] O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain*, 142.
[276] Weiler, 'Labour and the Land', 341.

From 'Slumdom' to Socialism: Slum clearance and urban planning

In 1945, the socialist and journalist Douglas Brown portrayed the inter-war working-class districts of Glasgow, Leeds and South Wales as vistas of 'long dreary terraces of uniform cottages, soon blackened with grime, now decrepit, insanitary and overcrowded.'[277] Brown's investigatory visits had concluded with a woman who slept in the same bed as her youngest child to protect her from the depredations of rats.[278] Whether Brown's account was exaggerated or not, the slums were real enough. If one aspect of Labour policy was gaining control over urban land for future use, the slums were an *existing* use of urban land of even greater concern. When one considers that the Industrial Revolution had the greatest effect on the British urban landscape in the nineteenth century, then removing the slums had the same radical effect for the twentieth century. Although slum clearance was perceived by Labour adherents as a *modern* act, the state-sponsored removal of the slums was by no means a teleological progression. Slum clearance can be divided chronologically into several phases, all of which represented different priorities and motives on the part of those carrying out clearance action. Equally, slum clearance addressed a structural issue lost to posterity – namely, the failure of the housing market to deal with rundown houses in a satisfactory fashion. In this light, what relation did slum clearance bear to Labour's efforts to reshape the urban environment in a modern, socialist fashion? And why was this undertaking thought to be a means of overcoming urban poverty? Through investigating how slum clearance fitted into Labour modern aims, it is possible to glimpse the intended route from 'slumdom' to 'socialism.'

In his account of the slums of Glasgow, Leeds and South Wales, Brown recounted that the inhabitants lacked clean air and were 'cut off from the natural colours of grass and trees and flowers.'[279] If the cases Brown described focused on the extremities of slum life, all the areas he listed were those that had suffered worst during the 1930s slump. This was the world of *The Road to Wigan Pier*: the areas that, whilst Orwell might have embellished his account, *did* have high unemployment, structurally poor older housing and extreme

[277] LHA, Brown, *An Englishman's Home*, 5.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid., 7.

overcrowding. Indeed, Leeds alone accounted for 59,005 houses demolished or closed throughout the slum clearance era from 1955-85: the second-highest slum clearance total of major British cities outside of London.[280] However, the mid-twentieth century notion of a slum was separate from its Victorian counterpart. Rather than referring solely to the cramped, filthy rookeries of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century use of the term comprised any dwelling considered 'unfit for human habitation.'[281] Priestley's 'industrial England' informed the slum description, but what constituted a slum evolved over time. Setting aside the effects of bomb damage, the worst housing stock in 1945 was in the 'industrial' Britain that mostly voted Labour. In this regard, Labour held to Malpass's claim that there is an 'iron link between poverty and poor housing.'[282] Moreover, it is likely that Brown's experience of the inter-war slums was far from exceptional. Even in Bristol, an area of relative prosperity during the thirties, a 1938 social survey estimated that 11,000 families in the survey area were impoverished, with a further 21,000 families 'whilst not in poverty, have a hard struggle, and whose lot is far from comfortable.'[283] Urban poverty was more often than not manifested in decrepit housing from before the First World War, and it was this legacy that Labour sought to banish.

As much as the image of the inter-war slum, the *legislation* of slum clearance expresses the ideas and assumptions that governed policy. Although Labour were not responsible for every Housing Act, they nevertheless carried out at a local level the measures detailed, and upheld elements of previous statutes that suited the party agenda. Whilst slum clearance procedure was intended to remove housing 'unfit for human habitation' from the housing stock, the legal framework of the system suggests a clinical attitude to both the working-class denizens of slum housing and the wider public health implications. Prior to 1945, two housing acts had guided slum clearance: the 1930 Housing Act allowing local authorities to acquire clearance areas of slum property, better known as the Greenwood Act after its Labour creator; and the

[280] Yelling, 'Incidence of Slum Clearance', 242. Manchester had the highest extra-London total, at 73,536. In spite of the existence of a large proportion of poor quality housing, Wales did not undergo slum clearance to any high degree, with Cardiff only clearing 4,408 houses between 1955-85. Scotland and Northern Ireland were subject to different housing laws and so their story of slum clearance is not told in depth here.
[281] Yelling, 'Incidence of Slum Clearance', 235.
[282] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 35.
[283] Tout, *Standard of Living*, 11.

1935 Housing Act, focused on reducing overcrowding.[284] As Simon Szreter has asserted, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was only wealthy and influential districts of cities that could ensure properly paved and clean streets, parkland and observance of building or planning regulations.[285] Legislation like the Greenwood Act went some way towards changing this, as local authorities were required to produce estimates of slum housing and five-year plans for clearance.[286] However, the link between slum clearance and public housing of the 1935 Act – which had limited house building subsidies to those constructed for persons cleared – made Labour initially wary of over-emphasising slum clearance.[287] After 1945, the Attlee government prioritised house building, though Labour were clear that removing the slums remained a key aim. The issue was that the party did not wish for house building to *only* proceed under the conditions of slum clearance – in a time of limited finance, dealing with the housing shortage took precedence.

In March 1945, Birmingham Labour councillors refused to countenance repairs of back-to-back houses, stating that it was wrong to ask returning servicemen to live in slum housing.[288] The 'back-to-back' was literally a row of houses backed on to each other, sometimes with a court behind, or completely surrounded by streets.[289] Alongside the tenement block of flats, back-to-backs were considered the worst built elements of the Industrial Revolution by reformers, the 'squalor' of the Beveridge Report incarnate.[290] As discussed in the previous chapter, municipalisation would later be at the forefront of Labour attempts to manage the slums that were not scheduled to be demolished. In the absence of this as a key policy in the 1940s, Labour members were unwilling to pay slum landlords for the upkeep of their property. Yet the alternative was little better – Tom Braddock had suggested requisitioning hotels and boarding houses as temporary accommodation for slum dwellers whilst decrepit property was cleared away.[291] Indeed, the shortages in 1946 had prompted a wave of squatting in abandoned army camps and unoccupied

[284] Harloe, *The People's Home*, 147.
[285] Szreter, 'Health, Class, Place and Politics', 32.
[286] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 42.
[287] Daunton, *Property-Owning Democracy*, 63.
[288] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Town Crier* (17 March 1945), 8.
[289] Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven, 1982), 117.
[290] Alison Ravetz, 'Housing the People' in Jim Fyrth (ed.) *Labour's Promised Land: Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51* (London, 1995), 146-162 at 149.
[291] LHA, Braddock, *Houses, Rents*, 14.

houses across the country.[292] Brown saw this as a measure of 'common justice', reporting a number of unused homes in Marylebone.[293] Nonetheless, given Orwell's infamous description of the foul conditions of inter-war boarding houses in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, it is hard to see how slum dwellers might have been persuaded that this would be an acceptable setup.

The 1946 Housing Act directed resources towards house building and the vast task of reconstruction. Slum clearance and redevelopment became a longer-term goal, to be carried out when the housing shortage had been overcome. According to a 1948 party pamphlet, over a million houses had been destroyed or damaged just through the V1 and V2 rocket campaign in the latter stages of the war, some of these houses having been repaired before being destroyed.[294] Bevan was focused on providing public homes beyond the previous 'sanitary' policy and secured subsidies from the Treasury for this purpose, rather than clearance.[295] Overall, slum clearance was a haltingly slow process under the Attlee government, something that has not gone unnoticed by other scholars.[296] Yelling has suggested that the 1949 Housing Act introduced a 'division of labour': local authorities would deal with redevelopment, but those private houses outside of redevelopment areas would be voluntarily improved by grants made out to private owners.[297] 'Improvement grants' were designed to be used on properties 'furthest removed' from those slated for slum clearance: structurally sound houses that could be made so for at least thirty years.[298] In spite of Labour visions of modern British cities unblemished by social squalor, old housing had to be temporarily maintained.

The 1950s saw a clear change in government policy towards slum clearance. Labour had come under increasing attack from the Conservatives regarding their supposed lack of initiative in dealing with the slums. Labour responded by arguing that the 'slum problem' was a Conservative creation. In one January 1951 pamphlet, the party suggested that slum dwellers had been:

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[292] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 125.
[293] LHA, Brown, *An Englishman's Home*, 7.
[294] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 9-10.
[295] Ravetz, 'Housing the People', 151.
[296] Jones, 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization', 512; Shapely, Tanner and Walling, 'Civic Culture and Housing Policy', 418.
[297] Jim Yelling, 'Public policy, urban renewal and property ownership, 1945-55', *Urban History*, 22:1 (1995), 48-62 at 53-4.
[298] Ibid., 54.

> …ignored by the Tories and Liberals. Between them these two parties had held power for all but two of the previous hundred or so years. They allowed the slums to grow. They did little to improve conditions.[299]

This line of attack may have initially worked. In spite of Labour's defeat at the 1951 general election, the Conservatives did not depart from house building as a priority. Nevertheless, this did not directly address the ten million households in England and Wales that by 1951 were either overcrowded, lacking basic amenities or living in conditions unfit for human habitation.[300]

The new Minister of Housing, Harold Macmillan pledged in his 'Grand Design for Housing' to build 300,000 houses annually by 1954, managing to win tentative Treasury support for the high expenditure that this would require.[301] Despite this, slum clearance was in a sense the second stage of the 'Grand Design': Macmillan sought a return to the inter-war 'sanitary' policy, with subsidies for council house building limited to rehousing those cleared from the slums.[302] This was not an immediate development; Weiler suggests that reducing housing subsidies was too controversial in the early 1950s and 'sanitary' slum clearance was not possible until after the Conservative victory.[303] Though there is a case for political salience, Weiler's analysis downplays the impetus for action against the slums in the early fifties. Yelling's contention that Macmillan intended to turn slum clearance into a separate concern, *in addition to* the Conservative desire to reduce council house building to a slum rehousing operation, is more compelling due to the scale of the slum issue.[304] Clearing the slums was not solely a convenient excuse to pare back public housing – it represented an end in itself. As a January 1954 *Socialist Commentary* article suggested '…what is required is a long-term policy for replacing houses when they wear out, like any other form of capital equipment.'[305] The city of the past was outdated: what was needed was a modern one.

The introduction of the 1954 Housing Repairs and Rents Act marked the beginnings of a renewed campaign of slum clearance. Going beyond previous

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[299] LHA, *Talking Points*, (21 January 1951), 6.
[300] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 82.
[301] Peter Weiler, 'The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives' 'Grand Design for Housing', 1951-64', *Contemporary British History*, 14:1 (2000), 122-150 at 123-4.
[302] Weiler, 'Conservatives' Search for a Middle Way in Housing', 362-3.
[303] Ibid., 363.
[304] Yelling, 'Public policy, urban renewal and property ownership', 56-7.
[305] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1954), 8.

legislation, the Act attempted to provide a universal standard of 'fitness' for slum housing to judge houses scheduled for slum clearance against.[306] Specifically, the 1954 Act listed key criteria which a property would have to meet in order to be declared 'fit' for human habitation, which included: the ability to be repaired; stability; freedom from damp; natural lighting; ventilation; water supply; drainage and an inside WC; facilities for storage, preparation and cooking of food, as well as for the disposal of waste water.[307] Further to this, back-to-back housing was uniformly declared 'unfit for human habitation.' This attempt to create a normative definition of 'slum' would later come in for criticism. In his 1970 study of slum clearance in Sunderland, Norman Dennis argued the '*degree* of dampness and the extent of disrepair and so forth - the standards of the items - are matters with which the Act does not deal.'[308] Similarly, Stephen Merrett suggested that 'the standard of fitness…necessarily reflected both the social values of the time and the resources likely to be allocated to it.'[309] An October 1954 *Labour's Northern Voice* piece reflected this, drolly asserting that 'some houses are built as slums, some become slums and some have slumdom thrust upon them.'[310] Whether having 'slumdom thrust upon' a property could be a consequence of tighter housing criteria was not commented upon.

Though Labour-controlled councils followed the standards provided by the 1954 Act, the party warned in one 1954 pamphlet that near-slum 'dilapidated houses' could be made fit at reasonable expense by the landlord. Pointing out that there was no definition of 'reasonable expense', Labour asserted that 'a reactionary local authority' could make matters easier for the landlord.[311] This signified both Labour's aim to reshape the urban environment in a modern fashion in its entirety, as well as a fundamental issue with this aim. On the one hand, there were far too many slum houses to condemn all outright, whilst on the other, it would be impossible to build houses in large quantities *and* clear away the slums. Michael Young argued in a June 1955 *Socialist Commentary* piece that he had identified seven million 'unfit' houses and that 'it would take at least twenty-five years of all-out effort by the building industry' to

[306] John English, Ruth Madigan and Peter Norman, *Slum Clearance: The Social and Administrative Context in England and Wales* (London, 1976), 25.
[307] *Housing Repairs and Rent Act 1954*, 9. Accessed online 8 May 2016 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/2-3/53/contents.
[308] Dennis, *People and Planning*, 123.
[309] Merett, *State Housing in Britain*, 121.
[310] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (October 1956), 4.
[311] LHA, *Talking Points* (16 January 1954), 5.

replace them.[312] Chapter One described Young's desire for municipalisation of slum properties, whilst Chapter Three will explore his reasoning for keeping older districts intact. Young contended that repairing 'structurally sound' slum properties would be a greater social good than slum clearance.[313] He had previously suggested in a November 1954 piece that 'we have a strange attitude to old houses', noting that richer people (such as, he wryly observed, architects and town planners) appeared to prefer them, but when it came to poorer people 'the sooner they are replaced by towering flats the better.'[314] Though Young's own interest in the terraces of Bethnal Green was flawed, he was prescient in his observation. In striving to remove *all* slums, however defined, Labour had to believe that slum dwellers could be rehoused *en masse* – and that it would be politically possible to sustain many years of clearance.

Defeat at the general election of 1955 ensured that Labour would continue to conduct slum clearance policy at the local level. Whilst removing subsidies for public housing constructed outside of slum clearance provisions, the 1956 Housing Act did not advance any subsidy to local authorities to reduce high compulsory purchase costs. Labour suggested that the Tory claim that the Act increased slum clearance powers were 'rubbish', as 'local authorities have plenty of powers already to deal with slum clearance. What they need is more money.'[315] In *Homes For The Future*, Labour identified three 'housing needs', including 'slum clearance' and 'housing improvement.'[316] How the latter need might be met in practice was shown in a September 1956 *Labour Woman* piece, in which the author visited an exhibition of four 'improved' terraced homes in Labour-controlled Bristol. The author reported approvingly that the indoor bathrooms, gas hot water systems and 'gay, bright colours' of the improved homes were such that 'it is a home that any young modern couple would jump at.'[317] Not all within Labour would agree that old houses could be satisfactorily improved – as Samuel would later assert, the mood of the age was that 'anything old was suspect and ripe for development.'[318] Though some

[312] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (June 1955), 169.
[313] Ibid., 170
[314] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (November 1954), 311.
[315] LHA *Talking Points* (21 January 1956), 13.
[316] LHA, Labour Party, *Homes For The Future*, 6.
[317] LHA, *Labour Woman* (September 1956), 169.
[318] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 58.

Labour actors felt that old houses could be sufficiently updated, others believed that bright colours or not, repairs could only ever be temporary at best.

An even more significant piece of housing legislation in Labour eyes was the 1957 Rent Act. The effects of the 1957 Act with regards to rent control has been examined at length in Chapter One, but its effects with regards to slum clearance were more insidious. Through liberalising the private rental market, rents were raised on near-slum houses and landlords were able in some instances to skimp on repairs. Reflecting on the 1957 Act in June 1963, one London Labour newspaper claimed that it condemned 'hundreds of thousands of tenants to impoverishment by rapacious landlords.'[319] Correspondingly, Labour actors were convinced that without municipalisation, existing slums would worsen and new slums would be created. Some within Labour went further – 'slum' equated to 'old house.' Stefan Muthesius has argued that housing reformers were mistaken in distinguishing between early and late-nineteenth century housing, pointing to the strictly enforced byelaw standards that later houses were built under.[320] But as he conceded, 'it was chiefly an aesthetic dislike…of their overwhelming repetitiveness' that saw byelaw houses declared unsuitable.[321] In this sense, it did not matter if a designated slum was truly a slum. A January 1957 *Labour's Northern Voice* article recommended that Labour councils declare rent-controlled properties to be clearance areas, as rents could then not be raised according to the 1936 Housing Act.[322] The assumption was, of course, that the tenants would not object to being immediately subject to slum clearance procedures.

A further issue was that of compensation to owner-occupiers of 'unfit' properties. It was easier for Labour actors to advocate low levels of compensation to landlords than to the individual homeowner. In a December 1959 LRPD memorandum, Alderman James Vickers of Bolton remarked that 'we all know that some people make bad bargains…they may not get all their money back - nor should they.'[323] Vickers plainly believed that the business of home ownership could be a risky one. In Dennis' study of Sunderland, he found that large numbers of his respondents were owner-occupiers and were unwilling

[319] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Baron's Court Citizen* (June 1963), 7.
[320] Muthesius, *English Terraced House*, 36.
[321] Ibid.
[322] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (January 1957), 8.
[323] LHA, LPRD Rd/13, 'Alderman James Vickers of Bolton: Slum Clearance' (December 1959).

to give up their 'structurally sound' yet 'unfit' cottages.[324] Hilda Jennings identified a similar situation in mainly owner-occupied Barton Hill within Bristol.[325] Writing in *Labour Woman* of January 1964, Douglas Houghton, MP for Sowerby, suggested that he had a constituent who had bought a house in line for clearance for £240 three years previously.[326] In a similar vein to Vickers, Houghton observed that despite the constituent being offered the 'site value' of £22 in compensation for his now-condemned house, 'the shadow of a coming Clearance Order must have been evident [when purchased].'[327] Those within Labour appeared to have little sympathy for those standing in the way of the modern future. In the late 1950s, many Labour actors appeared ardently committed to ripping down every terrace and tenement.

'The slum problem is not being solved – it is growing', lamented the academic John Greve in a February 1961 *Socialist Commentary* article.[328] 'Public squalor' occupied the minds of Labour observers after a further election defeat in 1959, and would continue to be a key point of debate throughout the 1960s. Greve went on to state that there were three million 'obsolete' houses in existence, with a large proportion lacking a fixed bath or hot water from a tap, and housing surveys did not allow for 'continuing obsolescence or for rising standards.'[329] This perception of stagnating or even worsening urban conditions was shared by others. The Communists had claimed in a 1960 pamphlet that 'the slums remain a breeding ground of disease and unhappiness.'[330] Though the Communists were principally referring to London, housing deterioration was a serious issue across Britain. Writing in *Socialist Commentary* of March 1961, a correspondent in Edinburgh claimed that the city had the worst housing conditions in Western Europe.[331] The correspondent considered Arthur Street such an 'abomination of squalor', that he believed it should be kept intact, like 'German concentration camps', as a memorial to a society 'which permits such degradation in these days of supposed affluence.'[332] Edinburgh's Conservative council maintained the Georgian old

[324] Dennis, *People and Planning*, 213.
[325] Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 26.
[326] LHA, *Labour Woman* (January 1964), 15.
[327] Ibid.
[328] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (February 1961), 18.
[329] Ibid., 18.
[330] LHA, LP/362.52, CPGB, Reuben Falber, *Beware Sharks: Tory Rent & Housing Policy Exposed* (1960), 11.
[331] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1961), 16.
[332] Ibid. Arthur Street was off Leith Walk, towards the old port of Leith.

town, but 'slums [had] no place in the briefs.'[333] In point of fact, Roy Hattersley recounted that when visiting Edinburgh with the Scottish Labour MP Donald Dewar, Hattersley had mentioned his surprise at the survival of old Edinburgh. Dewar supposedly retorted 'Well, that's because we didn't have a Labour council for thirty years!'[334] It would be fair to say Edinburgh's old town was a special case. Sue Goss has observed how aesthetic arguments for retaining housing had little effect on Southwark councillors, largely because they were from slums themselves.[335] If Arthur Street was an extreme example, it was by no means unique.

A June 1962 article in West Ham's local Labour paper reported on 'Britain's Horror Slum', located in Islington. Several eighty-four year old tenements known locally as 'The Crumbles' had sewage leaks, and a schoolboy living in the block was quoted as saying 'I don't mind sleeping with my three brothers and two sisters in one room, but I dread using those lavatories.'[336] In a September 1962 LPRD memorandum, it was claimed that three and a half million houses did not meet a preferred 'twelve point standard', due to the fact that public health inspectors continued to use inter-war standards of 'fitness'.[337] This being said, slum clearance was not universally accepted. Continuing the theme of his poorly-compensated constituent, Douglas Houghton remarked in December 1963 that the 'exciting vista of the town of tomorrow leaves [him] cold,' suggesting that clearance orders should be executed with 'kindness and understanding.'[338] Keith Joseph, Conservative Minister of Housing from 1962, believed correctly that slum clearance schemes had damaged the private rental market.[339] His misgivings reflected Conservative unease that they could not solely pursue a sanitary policy of slum clearance and limit local authority house building. Conversely, Labour's own solution to urban decay – mass demolition of old houses and replacement with modern, socialist metropolises – clearly had issues too.

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[333] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1961), 17.
[334] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords (3 March 2013). Dewar would later become inaugural First Minister of the devolved Scottish Parliament.
[335] Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, 72.
[336] LHA, LP/GS/8, *West Ham South Citizen* (June 1962), 2.
[337] LHA, LPRD Rd/330, 'Labour's Plan for Private Rented Houses' (September 1962). This would form the basis to *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* (1963).
[338] LHA, *Labour Woman* (December 1963), 9.
[339] Welshman, *Underclass*, 113.

The stagnation of older districts as a result of sluggish clearance programmes had an important racial dynamic. Anthony Richmond found in his study of late 1960s Bristol that Caribbean migrants had occupied dilapidated property in the inner areas of Montpelier and St Paul's, as the white population moved out to the suburbs and newly built council estates.[340] As these areas contained a high proportion of households without basic amenities, slum conditions persisted for the immigrant population as slum clearance stalled.[341] Paul Gilroy has argued that 'the housing question' was a focus of anti-immigrant in the late 1950s and 1960s, with an added racial dynamic to notions of squalor.[342] John Davis has written on how the situation was especially fraught in London, as the black community pooled funds to buy large properties but found themselves with white sitting tenants at controlled rents that could not be increased without removal.[343] Pressure was then placed on rent controlled tenants to leave, giving an 'ugly twist' to the housing crisis.[344] The 1958 Notting Hill riots, in which white 'Teddy Boys' attacked black immigrants, were framed against a perception of non-white landlord abuses – however, as Gilroy notes, the thuggishness of the Teddy Boy subculture played a pivotal role.[345] While Chapter One described the outcome of rent decontrol in the 1963 'Rachmanite' scandal, a major outcome of the scandal was a raised public awareness of the serious deterioration of to-be-cleared 'twilight areas' that immigrants had settled in.

Racial tensions arising from housing issues were embodied in unpleasant fashion in the Birmingham suburb of Smethwick during the 1964 general election campaign. Despite Labour's general election victory, the Labour MP Patrick Gordon Walker was unseated by Peter Griffiths, who had fought on an anti-immigration platform.[346] A *Socialist Commentary* report on the shock result claimed that Gordon Walker had been jeered from the count with calls of 'Where are your niggers now Walker? Take your niggers away with

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[340] Anthony H. Richmond, *Migration and Race Relations in an English City: A Study in Bristol* (London, 1973), 46-9. Harold Carter found similar conditions in his historical study of Southwark: Harold Carter, 'Building the Divided City: Race, Class and Social Housing in Southwark 1945-1995' *The London Journal*, 33:2 (July 2008), 155-185
[341] Ibid., 48.
[342] Paul Gilroy, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the cultural politics of race and nation* (London, 1992), first published 1987, 96-7.
[343] Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London', 80.
[344] Ibid.,84.
[345] Gilroy, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 97-8.
[346] Ibid., 100.

you. Up the Tories!'[347] Infamously, Griffiths was accused of allowing campaign stickers proclaiming 'if you want a nigger for your neighbour, vote Liberal or Labour.'[348] A growing immigrant population of Indians, Pakistanis and people from the Caribbean had moved into older property in Smethwick, much as had occurred in other industrial areas. Griffiths' campaign played upon local fears, claiming that a Labour victory would result in race riots.[349] The housing dimension was key: one newspaper article reflecting on the campaign in 2014 claimed that Griffiths had exploited 'anxiety over a housing shortage' and blamed immigrants for it.[350] Ironically, immigrants could not actually add to the council waiting list due to their being discriminated against, as the following chapter will discuss further. Nonetheless, playing on these fears was an effective tactic. An October 1964 *Tribune* piece pointed to the Labour gain in neighbouring Birmingham All Saints, which proportionally had greater levels of immigration – but where the Tory candidate had not utilised racial issues.[351] Smethwick would be regained by Labour in 1966, but the racial dimension to urban decay remained intact.[352]

Perceptions on immigration played but one part in bringing housing issues into sharper focus. Underlying deprivation became a major topic of discussion in the 1960s, as enduring housing poverty checked sharply prevailing notions of affluence and the promise of modernity. Writing in *Labour Woman* in November 1964, Frank Allaun criticised the fact that housewives were forced to use 'zinc slipper baths' rather than fitted bathrooms, remarking that there was "not much of the 'press-button" age for these mothers.'[353] Correspondingly, Arthur Skeffington had stated in a June 1963 article for *Labour's Northern Voice* that 'the twentieth century will be past history before Birmingham, Hull, Manchester and Oldham get rid of their slums at the present rate.'[354] Skeffington's comment is revealing of the difficulties Labour faced in

[347] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (December 1964), 5.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid., 7.
[350] *The Guardian* (15 October 2014), accessed online 6 June 2016 http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/15/britains-most-racist-election-smethwick-50-years-on.
[351] LSEA, *Tribune* (20 October 1964), 8.
[352] Unfortunately, this was not the end of Griffiths' career. He went on to write a book on the 'connection' between immigration and disease, and served as MP for Portsmouth North from 1979-1997.
[353] LHA, *Labour Woman*, (November 1964), 170.
[354] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice*, (June 1963), 3.

transforming the urban environment in a modern fashion. Whilst the Wilson government entered government determined to utilise the 'White Heat' of science to push Britain into a modern age, Eccleshall has commented that they did so through 'orchestrating a sense of national crisis.'[355] Labour's urban policy owed much to a convoluted understanding of history and modern change, which will be examined further in Chapter Four. In the context of slum clearance, the narrative of crisis had a paradoxical effect: Labour upped the rate of slum clearance, whilst gradually rehabilitating erstwhile slums. The 1963 pamphlet *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* gives some indication as to what would occur. In the pamphlet, the party stated that slum clearance had reached the point at which it was possible for

> Welwyn Garden City to have the same proportion of unfit houses as Stoke Newington, Cheltenham with the same proportion as Swindon, Carshalton with the same as St Pancras, and Tonbridge with more slums than Rhondda.[356]

The reality of continuous slum clearance was laid bare – if it was to operate cyclically, *all* houses would eventually be slums, regardless of the wealth of their inhabitants. This opened a difficult question for Labour – if the party acknowledged that a slum was not *always* a slum, then to what end could slum clearance continue?

In spite of the slim Labour majority after the 1964 general election, the Wilson government pressed ahead with a mass housing programme and intensified slum clearance. At what point did the two converge? Yelling has indicated that 'the balance between demolitions and public sector building had dangerously narrowed' in the early 1960s.[357] The substantial increase in public sector completions under Labour led to exceptionally high levels of slum clearance between 1966 and 1972, peaking at 71,586 properties demolished in 1968.[358] However, to see high-density housing as *purely* the outcome of slum clearance, as Dunleavy argued, is unwarranted.[359] Land pressures and the

[355] Eccleshall, 'Party Ideology and National Decline', 169.
[356] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Labour Party, *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* (1963), 4.
[357] Yelling, 'Incidence of Slum Clearance', 235.
[358] Ibid., 236.
[359] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing in Britain*, 72.

speed of industrialised building certainly linked high-rise building to slum clearance, but high-density construction had important architectural, sociological and political dimensions, which will be investigated further in Chapter Three. Blocks of flats *could* be a hard-headed choice on the part of constrained Labour councils – but such contrivance was not *always* the case. It is without question that Labour set themselves a colossal task of providing homes as well as removing them. In a January 1965 *Socialist Commentary* article, the Labour MP Ivor Richard suggested that three million families lived in 'slums, near-slums or in grossly overcrowded conditions', and the government target of 500,000 houses built annually by 1970 was not enough but 'at least realistic.'[360] Whilst the slum conditions that still existed were appalling, Labour's *perception* of slumdom was more far-reaching and threatened their sense of a modern urban transformation. Allaun claimed in February 1966 that the leaking roofs of slum houses, such as those in his Salford constituency, meant that 'tens of thousands of families (in the so-called Affluent Society) have rain pouring into their bedroom.'[361] While the leaking roofs may have been as widespread as Allaun claimed, it is questionable whether the removal of the entire slum house would have solved the question of urban poverty.

Labour policy began to shift in the late 1960s. Though Labour had remained committed to improving slum properties since the early 1950s, whether by municipalisation or by coercion of private landlords and owner-occupiers, this had been a strictly temporarily measure. It became a permanent arrangement, with Tony Greenwood's 1967 review of legislation resulting in the 1968 white paper *Old Houses Into New Homes*.[362] The document introduced 'general improvement areas', often the same spaces as slum clearance areas, offering landlords and property owners grants to improvement older properties.[363] A further Housing Act in 1969 gave these proposals legislative backing.[364] Whilst local unhappiness with redevelopment was a factor in this, Malpass has contended that it reflected an unwillingness within the Labour government to continue with enormous housing programmes.[365] Shapely, Merrett and Lowe have all argued that improvement was 'cheaper, quicker and

[360] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1965), 6.
[361] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (February 1966), 1.
[362] English, Madigan and Norman, *Slum Clearance*, 33.
[363] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 95.
[364] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 169.
[365] Ibid., 94-5.

easier.'[366] It is true that the squeeze on the Exchequer in the poor economic conditions of the late 1960s had an effect on slum clearance programmes. But does this adequately explain why Labour actors shifted their views? It is significant that the published 1969 report of Labour's Housing Policy Study Group stated that improvement grants would 'alleviate' the problem but that 'this must not be seen as an alternative to new house building.'[367] This was a compromise, not a retreat. The author of a February 1970 *Socialist Commentary* piece on redevelopment in Liverpool suggested that opponents of the process were regarded as being in favour of 'slums, gas lamps, cobblestones, air pollution, bad drains, bad teeth and nits in children's hair.'[368] Recalling Jane Jacobs, the author claimed that the destruction of Liverpool's 'side streets, alley ways, oyster bars, private houses' had also destroyed the 'old-time flavour' of the city.[369] If not all within Labour were willing to mourn the 'old-time flavour' of Liverpool, there was certainly a mood to rethink slum clearance. Greenwood argued in an April 1969 edition of *Labour Woman* that 'old houses that can be saved, must be saved and brought up to date.'[370] If the ambition of far-ranging modern urban transformation did not immediately cease, those within Labour came to believe that their chosen means of achieving modern, socialist cities was insufficient.

In a July 1971 lecture, Tony Crosland remarked 'I think we have had too much of the bulldozer, and have destroyed too many old houses and whole communities with them.'[371] Since Labour's 1970 general election defeat, Crosland had become Shadow Environment Secretary with responsibility for housing, and his speech became a Fabian pamphlet in 1971. He appended extracts of his speech to a working group on housing in December of that year, and whilst Crosland did not rule out slum clearance outright, it is striking that he was willing to critique it. In Crosland's appended remarks, he stated that 'we need an intensified effort [in house building] for at least a decade ahead' to resolve existing housing issues.[372] If slum clearance was viewed as an

[366] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 169; Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, 259; Lowe, *Welfare State in Britain*, 249.
[367] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Labour Party, *Report of the Housing Policy Study Group* (1969), 9.
[368] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (February 1970), 16.
[369] Ibid., 17.
[370] LHA, *Labour Woman* (April 1969), 64.
[371] LHA, LP/362.5/320, Fabian Society, Anthony Crosland, *Towards a Labour Housing Policy* (1971), 4.
[372] LHA, LPRD Rd/208, Housing Finance Working Group, A. Crosland, 'Towards a Labour Housing Policy' (Dec 1971), 3.

ineffective mechanism to address the problem of old houses, this did not mean that new houses were no longer a priority. By the 1970s, the spirit of the 'modern moment' to create new, utopian cities was passing, but the need for decent housing had not disappeared. Nevertheless, slum clearance was a phenomenon closely tied to the 'age of modernity': quite simply, it promised to remove the old in favour of a better new. Neither should it be forgotten that slum clearance aimed to serve a social purpose. Owen Hatherley has suggested that for the slum dweller, clearance meant being rehoused 'in something which was, more often than not, superior in terms of space, security of tenure and hygiene'[373] For Labour members, it was not the possibility of providing a superior home that ended with the demise of slum clearance. It was the faith that it was the most effective way of achieving a modern, socialist urban environment that was ultimately checked.

Conclusion

What can be taken from Labour's attempt to reshape the urban environment between 1945 and 1970? It is clear that those within Labour had a modern vision of urban Britain which corresponded with their desire for socialism. This was set against a reviled urban past, characterised by dark, dirty places of the sort described by Orwell and Priestley. With Labour's staunchest supporters in areas that bore some similarity to this, it is cogent that the party were fixated on an Orwellian urban image. Chapter Four will continue discussions of how Labour's sense of history shaped urban policy, but it is apparent that Labour actors believed removing the soot-encrusted dwellings of the Industrial Revolution was necessary to achieving the party's modern, socialist aims. This thesis argues that though these aims were not achieved, the British urban environment *was* strikingly reconfigured in the pursuit of them. When the *purpose* of Labour thought in the period is understood, the urban transformation of mid-twentieth century Britain seems less incongruous.

The vision of an urban environment that transcended the limitations of the 'Victorian' city had a clear effect on Labour's urban policy. Whilst the future that would replace 'Industrial England' in the eyes of Labour actors was generally a modernist one, it was not uniformly so and those within the party

[373] Hatherley, *Guide to the New Ruins*, xxiv.

retained a number of anachronistic preferences. In this regard, Labour thought could appear to conflict within its unifying logic: opposed to some of the nineteenth-century city, but in favour of modern municipalities *whilst* practicing a controlled form of urban dispersal. The New Town offered a novel means of building outside major cities without suburban 'sprawl', but the form only appealed to Labour whilst it could be closely controlled. Conversely, high-rise development *within* cities could be controlled, and though the issues of tower blocks became apparent by the late 1960s, high-density building was a more effective method for reshaping British cities in Labour eyes. The greatest flaw to this vision was the most prosaic: it rested on a 'complete trust in the power of 'ideal' environments to bring about…reform.'[374] This insistent paternalism led to an eventual acceptance within Labour that the long, painstaking transformation of the urban environment that their modern vision demanded would not be welcomed by the electorate in perpetuity. The Skeffington Report reflected changing times: the demise of the grand public project, and the passing of the modern moment.

The ways in which transport policy fitted into Labour's urban plans reveal the ambiguous character of their sense of modernity. Labour, whether consciously or not, moved towards the creation of an urban environment most suited to the motor car, rather than to the orderly public transport-orientated cities that Labour actors had first envisaged. The cough of the automobile engine had no inevitability to it, but its dominance in British cities was assisted by policy decisions. Crosland warned in 1962 that 'we should bitterly regret it in the future if we followed the American example, allowed public transport to decay, built more and more vast motor-ways into the city centre, and murdered the city in the process.'[375] Although not all British cities suffered this fate, enough did to create what Berman described as a 'growing split between the modern spirit and the modernized environment.'[376] Indeed, Priestley's 'England of arterial and by-pass roads' would prevail on an urban scale, as policy attempted to conform to the car rather than manage it.

Control of the land, in some form, was seen as vital to Labour's vision of urban transformation. This was not simply an expedient case – Labour's

[374] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 4.
[375] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 188.
[376] Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 310.

socialism corresponded to modern rationality in concluding that unchecked private ownership was incompatible with a utopian future. Whilst most Labour actors shared a distaste for *rentier* capitalism, the inability to decide on how best the dismantling of this system might be achieved undermined Labour efforts to do so. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act may have been the most potent of the schemes put forward, but only at the time of its application. As the experience of the Land Commission demonstrated, itself a convoluted update of the 1947 Act, the complexity of land policy could be its undoing. The Land Commission failed in the face of inter-departmental opposition and the fact that its powers to take over land were far too weak. There might have been more cheap urban land than Labour policy-makers believed. Barry Simons, the former Director of Housing in Newham from 1984-1993 claimed in a recent interview that 'there's loads of land in Newham, all over the place.'[377] Simons claimed that the development of the London Docklands and other 'brownfield' land showed how much 'wasted' land there was.[378] Not every post-war municipality operated under the same conditions as Newham, and Simons' statement in 2014 is indicative of current 'New Urbanist' thinking about inner-city building. At the very least, if Simons was correct in that a supposedly land-starved borough could have made better use of its existing land, the same may well have been true elsewhere.

Slum clearance, in Labour hands, had an internalised logic which dictated that 'virtually anything old was at risk.'[379] The pursuit of a modern urban future necessitated this: if the 'Victorian' urban environment was obsolete, or would be sooner or later, in the view of Labour actors there was not really any point in romanticising the built past. In the event, the impossibility of demolishing every 'unfit' building in Britain and simultaneously replacing these with homes of a decent standard was recognised. Improvement of the remaining 'unfit' stock was then a pragmatic judgement in a field in which dogma had ruled. Even if the zeal of some local authorities for demolishing the old remained undimmed, the moment of action had largely passed by 1970. The former West Ham councillor Keith Hasler reflected recently that

[377] Interview with Barry Simons, central London (17 June 2014).
[378] Ibid.
[379] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 67.

> …a lot of what was pulled down in in West and East Ham, justifiably so, as there was a lot of poor quality housing...I think in some areas they went too far...some worthwhile properties were demolished.[380]

Hasler's assessment would seem a reasonable overview of the consequences of Labour's modern, socialist aims. Slum clearance was an effective device for removing the very worst of the built past, but it became a self-sustaining process.

This chapter has sought to investigate how the understanding of modernity and socialism of those within Labour contributed to the creation of the urban environment between 1945 and 1970. The planning of the post-war cityscape of the future was more than the physical plans of post-war experts, or decisions in the council chamber. While this vision was unstable, and much of it did not come to pass, the *prospect* of modern, socialist British cities nevertheless informed the rationale for Labour's post-war urban policy. It is difficult to appreciate in the present day how forceful these ideals were, and what they meant to those advocating them. In a recent interview, the current Labour MP for East Ham Stephen Timms described the municipal thinking of the former East Ham council leader, Jack Hart. Hart was first elected to the council in 1935 and served as a councillor until 1985. As Timms put it,

> Jack Hart was someone who took a very high view of the capacity of the local borough…[he] used to tell me, his father was a tram driver and he drove trams for the county borough of East Ham...and you know, it used to run the trams, it used to generate electricity, own some of the housing, it was like a little government of its own. He told me proudly on one occasion, councils could run the telephone services![381]

This kind of municipal socialism was as much a part of Labour's vision of the city as modernist images of pristine, ordered cities. Labour actors believed that they could reshape the urban environment in its entirety. The modern, socialist urban future would not be troubled by private landowners, would be shorn of the shameful legacy of the Industrial Revolution and the buses would be public. It

[380] Interview with Keith Hasler, East Ham (16 June 2014).
[381] Interview with Stephen Timms MP, Portcullis House, Westminster (24 July 2014).

was a curiously admirable vision, even though the deficiencies soon became apparent. In present-day Britain, where such absolutist urban planning has long since passed into myth, the extent of Labour's vision seems all the more extraordinary.

Chapter Three: Workers' Cottages and Tall Towns

Class, Community and the Modern Home

Introduction

Writing in a 1955 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, the sociologist Michael Young claimed that for those trapped in decaying inner-city houses, modern living was symbolised by the new homes of their neighbours, with 'the steam hissing above the Ascot, the shiny new paint and the smoke rising from modern grates.'[1] Whilst the fittings might have changed over the period discussed in this thesis, Young's portrait of material modernity remained a steady feature of housing policy throughout the post-war era. Though the Conservatives consistently promised new homes in their appeals to the electorate, Labour placed an emphasis on not simply new but *modern* homes throughout the period, equipped with all the amenities of the atomic age. Given that the party had originally favoured 'workers' cottages' of the kind promoted by the Clydeside Labourite John Wheatley, exploring exactly why this close embrace of architectural modernism occurred across an often parochial movement is key to any explanation of the built legacy of 1945-70.

However, as Young alluded to in his description, there were spatial barriers of place and class to be overcome in bringing about modern cities. As a party originating from working-class organisations, Labour had (and has) a clear affinity with the lower segments of the British class structure. In the course of recent work on working-class experience and 'residualisation' of council estates, Ben Jones has suggested the most controversial question throughout the inter-war period was 'who ought to live in council housing?'[2] This class-infused proposition remained still true after 1945, and with the perceived spread of affluence from the 1950s, a protracted social debate as to whether council housing should be universal, for the working classes alone, or for a vulnerable 'underclass' continued. Across the pages of Labour periodicals and in official publications, Labour politicians and activists expressed a variety

[1] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (June 1955), 168. An 'Ascot' was a gas-powered water heater, with gas heating a novelty to those who had previously used coal fires.
[2] Jones, *The working class*, 82.

of views on the subject, which had a subtle but clear effect on housing policy. Returning again to Young, the concept of 'community' was a crucial part of all discussion on housing in the period examined. Young's work on the subject is emblematic of the influence on policy of ideas about what an ideal community should look and feel like. As a leading Labour-leaning intellectual, as well as a major figure in the field of sociology, Young was the most prominent but by no means the only social scientist to attempt to discern what people 'really wanted' from their living environment. Even if the question of 'what makes a good community' has never really vanished from British social discourse, there has been a tendency to take the social science of the period at face value without really understanding the debate beneath it.[3] The ideas of social scientists provide an additional means of comprehending the scale of urban transformation in the period, as well as having a gradual intellectual pull on the course of Labour housing policy. Whilst the previous chapter dealt with the wider city, and investigated attempts to craft British cities into manifestations of a modern age, this chapter will endeavour to understand how the streets, lifts, concrete exteriors and stainless steel interiors of the housing underpinning this futuristic vision fitted into wider debates over design, class and community.

When applied to Britain, and especially England, the question of aesthetic preference in housing has powerful cultural determinants. Writing in 2012, Owen Hatherley asserted that 'Britain is more obsessed than ever with an imaginary rural Arcadia which bears less and less resemblance to the places where we actually live.'[4] This utopia has a distinguished pedigree; the Tudor Walters report of 1918 recommended an expressly 'vernacular, rural' cottage design for working-class housing, evoking a simple (if imagined) past, influenced in part by the presence on the report committee of Raymond Unwin of the Garden City movement.[5] As mentioned, the Labour forerunner to this 'workers' cottage' was the inspiration of John Wheatley in his 1913 pamphlet *Eight-Pound Cottages for Glasgow Citizens*. Wheatley depicted a detached

[3] Dominic Sandbrook offers an interesting example of this, critiquing Young and Willmott's attack on suburbia and implying that 'affluent' suburbia was regarded more positively than 'traditional' working class communities in his history of 1950s Britain: Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 124-5. He went on to suggest that the end of the 'traditional' working class community was a tragedy in his history of Britain in the early 1970s, taking on later sociological work heavily critical of council estates: Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain 1970-1974* (London, 2011), 358-359.

[4] Hatherley, *New Kind of Bleak*, xxiii. Joe Moran has also examined this 'Arcadia' in: Joe Moran, 'The Strange Birth of Middle England', *Political Quarterly*, 76:2 (April 2005), 159-313.

[5] Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 218-220.

'four-apartment house' of a distinctly rural style, though his point of reference may have been Ireland (his place of birth), with a section of the pamphlet noting successful government schemes to improve Irish cottages.[6] Whilst the recommendations of Tudor Walters were the basis of inter-war council housing schemes, to the extent that those built by the LCC 'reflected a watered-down version of the garden suburb', Wheatley's cottage could be said to be an archetype for those within Labour who believed houses for working people should reflect pre-Industrial Revolution parochial tastes.[7] Indeed, the 'Bevan House', promoted as the epitome of the housing drive of the 1945-51 Labour government by the eponymous Aneurin Bevan, took a 'bourgeois' and 'traditional' design.[8] By contrast, with the tradition of tenement living in Scotland, Scottish councils were quite content to build flats as suburban estates were constructed in England and Wales.[9]

On the whole, Labour were rather slow to come around to the flat, and other distinctively modern forms of housing. In a highly critical assessment of flat living published in 1974, Anthony Sutcliffe posited that the popularity of modern flats amongst the middle classes in the inter-war period legitimised them for use by working-class council tenants – though Birmingham Labour Party cited this middle-class multi-storey lifestyle as a reason why flats were *not* appropriate for the working classes.[10] Conversely, the leading London Communist Ted Bramley used Berthold Lubetkin's 'Highpoint' luxury flats in Highgate as the basis for his arguments about flat desirability: Lubetkin assured him that similar modern amenities, as well as spacious gardens, tennis courts and a children's paddling pool, would be a feature of most working-class flats.[11] Moreover, Alison Ravetz claimed in her study of inter-war flat construction that modernism '…reminded observers of international trends, symbolised progress and helped to establish flats as an indispensable ingredient of modern urban environments.'[12] The sense that modern design, and in particular flats, might

[6] LHA, Wheatley, *Eight-Pound Cottages*, 6 and 13.
[7] Peter Clark and Jussi S. Jauhiainen, 'Introduction' in Peter Clark (ed.), *The European City and Green Space: London, Stockholm, Helsinki and St Petersburg 1850-2000* (Aldershot, 2006), 1-29 at 24.
[8] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 130.
[9] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 154.
[10] LHA, Birmingham Labour Party, *Homes For the People*, 9.
[11] LHA, Bramley, *Lights on London*, 46-8.
[12] Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat', 138.

provide the materially superior socialist future that many within Labour envisaged would be a constant feature of left-wing deliberation.

It would be difficult if not impossible to discuss the history of housing without reference to class. Far from a simple question of economic structures, class consciousness and identity are 'positional and relational', and as Stephen Brooke has remarked 'class identity is found…in a sense of the limits of urban space.'[13] As scholars such as Ben Jones, Clare Langhamer and Jon Lawrence have recounted, the spatial elements of class and social change as a result of slum clearance, council housing and affluence have received relatively limited attention by historians.[14] Above all others, the working classes have been the primary focus of discussions about council housing. Yet *who* the working classes were, and *what* made one working class is rarely articulated. For the purposes of this thesis, the politicised *representations* of the working classes as the bottom rung of a 'structural' hierarchy of economic power and as a heterogeneous group sharing a common 'culture' will be adopted, with the caveat that neither of these representations were stable or neutral.[15] The belief that those in the working class who adopted a suburban lifestyle became 'bourgeois', whilst those who remained in older areas retained their identity as workers has been effectively challenged by scholars. Most recently, Jon Lawrence has asserted that the belief in a 'traditional' working-class culture was entirely false, with '…no cataclysmic exodus from mutualistic communitarianism to atomized, materialist individualism.'[16] Conversely, whether the responses of Labour adherents to a perception of increased affluence and new living environments actually affected housing provision has been less thoroughly investigated.

Perhaps the most celebrated of Labour commentators on the affluent society, Anthony Crosland, encapsulated leftist impressions in 1959, arguing that 'the basic fact about our social situation today is not a Marxist-type economic class-struggle…our social antagonisms now have much more subtle

[13] Brooke, ''Slumming in Swinging London'', 431-6.
[14] Jones, *The working class*, 77; Langhamer, 'Meanings of Home'; Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life'; Jon Lawrence, 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35:2 (2000), 307-318 at 316.
[15] Lawrence, 'British Sense of Class', 318.
[16] Jon Lawrence, 'Inventing the 'Traditional Working Class': A re-analysis of interview notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*', *Historical Journal*, 59:2 (2016), 567-593 at 593.

origins.'[17] Another revisionist MP writing after the general election defeat in 1959, Douglas Jay, suggested that Labour was 'in danger of fighting under a label of class that no longer exists.'[18] Whilst both of these MPs were especially forthright in promoting a sense that Labour needed to change with the times, and their analyses would prove to be half-correct at best, they capture some of the uncertainties Labour believed they faced through a common increase in prosperity. If the working classes were supposedly becoming more 'bourgeois', or even ceasing to exist in the terms understood by Labour, would they still be the intended recipients of council housing? Lawrence Black has described how Labour councils attempted to act as a 'moral vanguard' in their management of estates, viewing their tenants as a sort of 'deserving poor.'[19] In this regard, it is perhaps necessary to view Labour approaches to council housing in the period through a paternalistic lens, with affluence posing a challenge to structures of welfare. Further to this, the broader technological and cultural changes taking place across the era studied clearly had a considerable effect on one's sense of identity. In her 1960 study of Banbury, the social scientist Margaret Stacey observed that prior to 1930 Banbury life would have been more recognisable 'to a man who had lived a hundred years earlier than to one living at the present day, only twenty years after.'[20] Labour ambitions to provide better housing throughout this period of sustained change would be confronted by a shifting sense of identity in the class from which they drew their support.

In concluding his 1953 survey of a new council estate in Coventry, the sociologist Leo Kuper considered that 'community is a vague concept, and difficult to use either in research or planning, since it describes a qualitative aspect of the cohesion of a group.'[21] Whilst Kuper may have raised a sociological point that remains pertinent in the present day, his apprehension was not shared by the majority of his peers in the social sciences, nor indeed by those across the political spectrum. Dominant questions in the social sciences of income, employment and housing prompted interest in new inter-war housing estates amongst researchers.[22] In particular, social investigators such as Ruth

[17] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (September 1959), 8.
[18] Richard Jobson, '"Waving the banners of a Bygone age", Nostalgia and Labour's Clause IV Controversy, 1959-60', *Contemporary British History*, 27:2 (2013), 123-144, 125.
[19] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 34.
[20] Stacey, *Tradition and Change*, 10.
[21] Leo Kuper, 'Blueprint for Living Together' in Leo Kuper (ed.), *Living in Towns* (London, 1953), 1-202, 170.
[22] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life', 274.

Durant, examining the LCC Watling estate in north-west London, were concerned with determining the strength of community in new settlements – especially on unfamiliar council estates. Durant asserted in the introduction to her study that a community was 'a territorial group of people with a common mode of living, striving for common objectives', a description not tremendously different from E.P. Thompson's later description of class formation as deriving from 'common experience.'[23] Durant believed that the predominance of young families on the estate and the removal of people from the 'old mean street' of working-class life, meant that Watling could only ever be an 'artificial community': a claim repeated by Rosamund Jevons and John Madge in their study of peripheral council estates in Bristol.[24] Whilst 'community' as a pivotal element of one's living environment has distant origins, Patricia Garside has remarked that throughout the nineteenth century, it was believed that 'the 'highest sphere' of life was expressed through voluntary associations and the local community.'[25] It is likely that the Garden City movement's focus on 'social cohesion' brought the idea to the fore in town planning during the inter-war period, being an organisation with a voluntarist ethos of the late-Victorian type.[26] For Labour, community was seen as something that could be both designed into housing development and inspired through a rich associative lifestyle, based in part on *fin-de-siècle* utopian socialist attempts to create alternative 'radical settlements'.[27] Existing communities were viewed as something to be improved upon: as an internal housing report suggested in 1942, 'The East End [of London] of the future should be as desirable a place to live as the West End.'[28]

Conversely, after 1945 social investigators would tend to contrast newer housing estates negatively with established communities, whilst extolling the virtues of a participatory lifestyle.[29] Most influential in this line of thought, as the previous chapter also noted, was Michael Young. Head of the LPRD from

[23] Durant, *Watling*, ix; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1980), first published 1963, 10.
[24] Durant, *Watling*, 15; Jevons and Madge, *Housing Estates*, 70.
[25] Garside, 'Citizenship, civil society and quality of life', 261.
[26] Beach and Tiratsoo, 'The Planners and the Public', 528.
[27] Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 83.
[28] LHA, Housing and Town Planning Sub-Committee, 'Preliminary Report', 5.
[29] For work mostly conducted in the 1950s, see Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*; Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*; Young and Willmott, *Family and Class*; Willmott, *Evolution of a Community*; Stacey, *Tradition and Change*; Jennings, *Societies in the Making*. For work mostly conducted in the 1960s, see Dennis, *People and Planning*; Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*.

1945-50 and author of the 1945 party manifesto, Young continued to have a powerful intellectual influence on Labour. He was a friend of both his replacement as LPRD head, Peter Shore, and of Anthony Crosland, as well as being a frequent contributor to the revisionist Labour journal *Socialist Commentary*. In addition to his significance within Labour, Young had tremendous authority in the field of sociology. The 1957 publication of *Family and Kinship in East London*, written jointly with frequent co-collaborator (and Labourite) Peter Willmott, was of seminal importance to British sociology, and as it will be argued, to housing policy. *Family and Kinship* painted a world in which the dispersal of working-class families from the close-packed slums of Bethnal Green to suburban homes in Debden (then in Essex) broke family ties and mutual dependencies, failing to recreate 'community' in a meaningful way. Mike Savage has asserted that *Family and Kinship* marked a move away from 'observational' studies of localities to emphasising a 'historical, temporally embedded, character which endures in a changing environment', in this case the working-class family.[30] Most significantly, Young enjoyed similar levels of influence to figures such as the literary critics Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams or the historian Eric Hobsbawm, which was unusual for a social scientist, with the humanities the dominant academic influence on social commentary.[31] Whilst currents of thought within Labour would move towards higher-density settlement as a means of maintaining or recreating community, the reification of working-class life 'as it was' by sociologists like Young and Willmott would contribute to a contorted understanding of community, not least the belief that it could be defined objectively. This belief, both within and without Labour, had lasting effects on the way that the urban landscape of Britain has been imagined, designed and built.

Getting Rid of Class Barriers? Class, affluence and the modern home

The sense of 'progress' that characterised the onset of modernity in the mid-twentieth century had, and has been perceived to have had, a powerful class element. Assessing the course of working-class history after 1945, Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook asserted that the belief that the welfare state

[30] Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change since 1945: the politics of method* (Oxford, 2010), 158.
[31] Ibid., 118.

was the reward for past working-class burdens was a complete fantasy, stating that it was an 'an extraneous visitation which rained down blessings on the just and unjust alike.'[32] Nevertheless, the sense that there was a teleological progression from slum to modern council flat has remained a powerful one in spite of the warnings of historians.[33] This is in part because it is precisely how the change was characterised by social commentators in the period. In the conclusion to his 1945 pamphlet, the socialist author Douglas Brown stated that 'the slums are a symbol of the old world and decent modern houses are a symbol of the new.'[34] With considerably more ambiguity, George Orwell suggested in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that the replacement of the 'smoke-dim slums' of the industrial north by council houses was a marked improvement, 'but only by a small margin.'[35] As the party of the working classes, Labour politicians certainly took the view that they were duty-bound to provide decent homes for 'their people', and this was especially the case in local politics. Sue Goss described the Labour council in Southwark between 1945-64 in these terms, suggesting that 'they reflected in many ways the close-knit, somewhat insular communities they represented, conservative in social policy, but with strongly held views on the loyalty and natural affiliations of the working man.'[36]

Whilst it is true that the Labour leadership gradually ceased to resemble the more working-class communities that they represented throughout the same period, the party as a whole nevertheless retained a belief that 'progress' was something to be passed to the people by them, through trusted council officers. Frank Mort has suggested that 'progressive paternalism' characterised the majority of state intervention into housing and urban planning throughout the period.[37] The rise of material prosperity amongst the working classes, together with the gradual change in traditional habits amongst a new generation, presented a clear challenge to the kind of understanding of the working class described by Goss. This would develop by the late 1950s into a sense that the working class was being 'unmade', which if Labour was to continue to depend electorally on working-class votes, represented an existential threat to the

[32] Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook, *A World Still To Win: The Reconstruction of the Post-War Working Class* (London, 1985), 92.
[33] Harloe, *The People's Home*, 15. For a recent narrative that leans towards this sort of teleology, see Dorling, *All that is Solid*.
[34] LHA, Brown, *An Englishman's Home*, 26.
[35] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 2001), first published 1937, 65-7.
[36] Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, 58.
[37] Mort, 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life', 150.

party.[38] This belief in the conversion of the working class to a middle-class identity was not confined to Labour. John Turner has described how the Conservative Research Department thought that *embourgeoisement* of the proletariat was underway, and it would be a boon to Conservatism, wryly describing it as 'Friedrich Engels, eighty years too late.'[39] If in the era of 'affluence' the sense that the working class was not quite what Labour imagined it to be was widespread, it is a real question what impact Labour responses to increased working-class affluence had on housing policy. Was council housing an appropriate working-class home for the modern, affluent age?

Speaking in 1971, Anthony Crosland observed that 'we know surprisingly little about people's *aspirations* for different types and standards of housing.'[40] He went on to consider that the Labour government of 1945 had wanted council estates to be 'well balanced and socially mixed communities, enabling (for example) teachers, doctors, local authority employees and social workers to live in the communities which they served.'[41] Crosland's commentary revealed a curious imbalance in Labour's approach to housing between the years 1945 and 1970; Labour knew very little about the desires of those they built housing for, and yet intended for council housing to be both a working and middle-class tenure. Whilst as successive writers have demonstrated, it is a truism that the provision of council housing was a top-down and not particularly consultative exercise, it is nonetheless revealing that Labour operated according to a *perception* of what the inhabitants of modern council housing should look like.[42] By and large, council estates did not become the 'socially mixed' form championed by Crosland, in part through changes in rent levels described in Chapter One and in part by choice on the part of those teachers and doctors described in 1971. Perhaps even more crucially, the rise of affluence destabilised the paternalistic council housing culture, and gave rise to arguments both within and without Labour that it was inappropriate for 'affluent' or 'respectable' workers to be resident on council estates. In his charting of the 'residualisation' of council housing in Brighton, Ben Jones has noted that the

[38] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life', 289. Lawrence also discussed his ideas on the 'unmaking' of the working class in an engaging Radio 4 documentary from 2014: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b045z7s8
[39] Turner, 'A Land Fit for Tories to Live In', 203.
[40] LHA, Crosland, *Towards a Labour Housing Policy*, 3.
[41] Ibid., 17.
[42] For a discussion of the lack of consultation with residents due to be rehoused, see: Shapely, *Politics of Housing*.

local press began to argue that affluent tenants should not live in council homes from as early as the 1930s, their arguments increasing in volume in the 1950s.[43] As Jones has discussed, the shift from 'respectable' working class to 'residualisation' had given rise by the 1970s to two opposing depictions of working-class neighbourhoods, with council estates represented as failed communities, set against idealised poorer neighbourhoods of the pre-council housed past.[44] As the following section will explore in more detail, these two pictures of working-class life were given additional weight by the findings of social scientists, who had a tendency to reify older, established communities and critique the shortcomings of new estates. Prior to this, it is important to question why residualisation occurred and why 'affluence' represented such a threat to Labour visions of modernity, through the question 'who was council housing for?'

Since the Addison Act of 1919, local authorities had been required to build housing 'for the working classes.'[45] As has been commented upon in the previous two chapters, Labour resented this specificity as it restrained its ambition to provide housing for all, with council housing tied explicitly to slum clearance in the 1935 Housing Act.[46] However, during the 1945-51 period in government, Labour were able to move towards building council homes on a universal basis: a 1948 party publication observed approvingly that local authorities were now 'catering for general needs, and not for that indefinable category "the working classes".'[47] In 1949, Labour were able to pass a Housing Act removing the restriction on building 'for the working classes', regarded as an important symbolic gesture by Bevan.[48] However, the ejection of the Labour government from power in October 1951 presented new questions about what the priorities for housing should be, once Labour regained power as it might have assumed to after a short period of Conservative government. In a lecture given in central London in November 1951, the editor of the *New Statesman* and prominent socialist Kingsley Martin suggested that Labour had lost in part as the party leadership 'did not know where they were going' after they had

[43] Jones, *The working class*, 96-7.
[44] Ibid., 110.
[45] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 29.
[46] Harloe, *The People's Home*, 184.
[47] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 22.
[48] Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour*, 130.

established the principles of the welfare state.[49] Though Martin might have been uncharitable, reflecting left-wing dissatisfaction – given the extenuating economic circumstances of the period, the Labour government were focused on spreading the new welfare state as far as could be possible – he made an interesting point. In terms of housing, whilst Labour's period in government had broadly established a principle that council housing should be built for all, for the most part in the late 1940s local authorities aimed to house the 'working classes.' Critiquing the situation in the period, the left-wing Labour MP Tom Braddock suggested that 'housing, like everything else, is provided on a class basis and not on a basis of need.'[50] Martin went on to suggest that although a welfare state had been created, it was a reflection of Scandinavian social democracy rather than socialism, and there might yet remain wide inequalities within it.[51] Indeed, Ross McKibbin has cited Attlee's bizarre behaviour in organising the 1951 election – announcing the date to cabinet with only seven ministers present – as an example of Labour's inability to seriously think about how a social democratic or socialist state might look.[52] This hint that the welfare state might not be as 'universal' as Beveridge had intended was to be an especially pressing point, particularly when applied to debates within Labour over housing in the 1950s.

In Chapter One, it was asserted that the relatively widespread feeling within Labour by the mid-1950s that the private rented sector was not up to the job of providing decent accommodation led to an emphasis on council housing as an alternative, if not superior form of housing for a modern, socialist state. There was a powerful class element to this focus on council housing as a kind of vanguard tenure, which corresponded with a sense that housing policy under the Conservatives remained stagnant and even regressive, given the phasing out of the general housing subsidy by the Tories.[53] Writing on the subject in 1954, James MacColl argued that it was important that Labour councils continued to regard council housing as a 'classless' tenure, maintaining that 'so long as we believe in mixed development and wish municipal estates to be representative of the whole community we must avoid a covert means test by

[49] LSEA, Fabian Society, FABIAN/291, Kingsley Martin, *Socialism and the Welfare State* (1951), 1. Martin's lecture was part of the Fabian Society's Autumn Lecture series of that year.
[50] LHA, Braddock, *Houses, Rents*, 21.
[51] LSEA, Martin, *Socialism and the Welfare State*, 10.
[52] McKibbin, *Parties and People*, 175.
[53] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing in Britain*, 35.

selecting only poorer families.'[54] Earlier that year, a *Socialist Commentary* article had suggested that housing policy was still based on a Victorian way of thinking, centred around three points: that building should be done speculatively; slum clearance where necessary; and that the working classes should be housed.[55] On the latter point, the author considered that the housing of the people as a whole should be seen as a societal aim, positing 'if health is to be treated as a social service, is it not anomalous to exclude housing, or to treat it piecemeal?'[56]

On the intellectual right of Labour, Gaitskell, Crosland and others made exactly this point: that housing should be a universal service to avoid council housing being seen as merely housing for the poor. Denys Munby emphasised this point in 1957, stating that the building of council housing for 'workers' by Labour councils was a 'counsel of despair', as it signalled that they had given up on the idea of 'classless' communities.[57] It should be pointed out that there was considerable resistance from the left of Labour to anything that might seem to move the working classes from being first in the queue for council homes. Though the principle of universal access to housing was not an especially controversial egalitarian proposal, as Ben Jackson has noted, it did run the risk of being seen as a distraction from socialism.[58] Equally, it was questionable whether 'classless' communities would actually form in practice. Examining the working-class areas of predominantly middle-class Woodford in North London in a 1960 study, Young and Willmott noted that whilst objective differences in material welfare were smaller than they had been in the past, 'inside people's minds…the boundaries of class are still closely drawn.'[59] As the next section on perceptions of 'community' will explore more fully, forming cohesive neighbourhoods of the type imagined by Labour was in many ways more an aspiration than a reality.

Recalling his experiences as Chair of the Housing Committee of Sheffield City Council, Roy Hattersley suggested that for post-war Sheffield councillors, housing was a 'redistributive' issue. As Hattersley put it, 'there was the assumption that the council tenants were the poor, which is one of the

[54] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 20.
[55] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1954), 7.
[56] Ibid., 8.
[57] LHA, Munby, *Home Ownership*, 25-6.
[58] Jackson, 'Revisionism Reconsidered', 438.
[59] Young and Willmott, *Family and Class*, 122.

mistakes we made, in designing the housing for the poor.'[60] Selina Todd has suggested that the fact that inter-war social surveys saw the working classes as 'poverty-stricken unemployed in need of rescue, remedy or reform' had important effects on the perception of working-class experience post-war.[61] Chapters One and Two have described the tendency of housing reformers to indulge in 'progressive paternalism' towards those deemed to be in need. This perception of council housing as a 'poverty tenure' has been a lasting one, reaching a state of near-ubiquity in the present day. The author Lynsey Hanley has gone so far as to suggest that this was already the case in 1945, asserting that 'snobbery is snobbery, and council estates, no matter how pleasing they were to the eye, offended homeowners purely because they housed large numbers of poor people, and did so visibly.'[62] Hanley was not incorrect in that council housing had acquired an inter-war reputation as a 'poverty tenure', due to the focus on housing tenants from slum areas, though Crosland remarked in *The Future of Socialism* that council housing was losing these connotations at the time of writing in the mid-fifties.[63] As Malpass has pointed out, and Chapter One has covered in more detail, the level of rents alone would suggest that council housing was aimed at a better-off grade of worker.[64] Where Hanley's statement is more problematic is that 'poor people' have been conflated with the 'working classes', when this was not always the case.

In his study of the established working-class district of St Ebbes in Oxford published in 1956, the sociologist John Mogey found that his interviewees alternately claimed St Ebbes was both 'respectable' and 'rough'.[65] This contradictory description was by no means uncommon. In their study of estates in Norwich in the latter half of the twentieth century, Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor explored how residents could themselves create status divisions within their own class, with sub-sections of estates being considered 'rougher' or more snobbish.[66] Norbert Elias and John Scotson found a 'distinct form of social stratification' existing between an established working-class community and a newer working-class district in their study of the pseudonymous 'Winston

[60] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[61] Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street', 503.
[62] Hanley, *Estates*, 81.
[63] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 144.
[64] Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State*, 25.
[65] Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, 140.
[66] Rogaly and Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community*, 69.

Parva' near Leicester in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[67] In this sense, during his observations of a New Town in 1959 the sociologist Geoffrey Gibson remarked that one person had told him that 'we are all Elephant and Castle round here, but that street over there, they're Islington and Cricklewood. North Londoners – all stuck up and think they're so much better than us.'[68] Quite apart from distinctions north and south of the river Thames, there was of course considerable regional variation in poverty and status. In a 1930s social survey of Bristol, the economist Herbert Tout had found that 'there can be little doubt that the Bristol working classes are distinctly better off than those of London, and probably of other towns.'[69] Conversely, Richard Hoggart remembered working-class life in his 1930s childhood environment of Hunslet, Leeds, to be 'closer to the ground' – Hoggart claimed that the hardness of working-class life let to a collective feeling of 'us' and 'them.'[70] Whilst Hoggart infused his narrative with nostalgia for a world he, as a university academic, had long since left, it is the case that poverty of some description had been a feature of many working-class neighbourhoods in the inter-war years. Yet the difficulties of defining the 'poor', and the likelihood that some of the working classes could be described as such and some could not, meant that Labour's own approach to housing the 'poor' was likely to be highly subjective.

In spite of established assumptions of who the working classes or the 'poor' were, and what they were in need of, increasingly visible material affluence and changing patterns of life in the 1950s began to provoke a response from Labour. Most decisive was the failure to win the general election of October 1959 – Labour's third successive defeat. Labour had generally believed it would win, and the failure to do so was taken as evidence by many on the revisionist wing of the party that they were appealing to a working class that no longer existed. The problem with this judgement was that revisionists tended to believe wholeheartedly that the working classes had entered a phase of *embourgeoisement*, with material luxuries such as the refrigerator, the motor car and suburban homes diminishing their proletarian sensibilities.[71] As Jon Lawrence has noted, sociologists largely joined in, with Robert Millar predicting

[67] Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* (London 1994), first published 1965, 16.
[68] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (April 1959), 12.
[69] Tout, *Standard of Living*, 51.
[70] Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 88.
[71] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 152.

the formation of a 'technicist' class melding the lower-middle and upper-working classes together.[72] The response of the Labour left was little better: in a 1959 essay, Crossman claimed that 'affluence' would be overtaken by Soviet progress, and moreover, that 'the luxuries, gadgets, entertainments and packaged foodstuffs' of the affluent society were 'irrelevant and even vulgar and immoral, compared with the solid respectability of the Communist way of life.'[73]

Most significant in setting the tone of the debate was the 1960 survey of voters by the political scientists Mark Abrams and Richard Rose, entitled *Must Labour Lose?*, in which they suggested that Labour was losing the allegiance of an 'affluent' working class.[74] Chapter One has discussed how increasing working-class owner-occupation was one characteristic of this. Although, as Lawrence has noted, Abrams and Rose actually acknowledged in their study a lack of evidence linking consumption patterns to voting habits, this did not diminish interest within the Labour Party on the subject.[75] Further to this, in a series of articles for *Socialist Commentary* prior to the publication of the study, Abrams addressed the question head on, with an article in August 1960 claiming that prosperity did not convert the working classes into 'urban peasants determined to resist any party likely to threaten acquisitiveness.'[76] Abrams went on to state that his findings actually uncovered that ownership of consumer goods did not equate to voting Conservative: equal proportions of those owning washing machines or refrigerators voted Labour or Conservative.[77] Where there did appear to be a difference was in home ownership, with only 20 per cent of the voters in Abrams' survey who owned their own home voting Labour, contrasting with 46 per cent of those living in council housing who said they voted Labour.[78] A note by the Labour Party Research Department also picked out this point on differences in tenure, as well as remarking that Abrams did not appear to consider 'the (perhaps considerable) social and environmental pressures on [the voter's] political attitudes and loyalties.'[79] As Chapter One has examined, Labour were not averse to owner-occupation, but at some levels

[72] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life', 284.
[73] R.H.S. Crossman, *Planning for Freedom* (London, 1965), 100.
[74] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 126.
[75] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life', 284.
[76] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (August 1960), 5.
[77] Ibid., 6.
[78] Ibid.
[79] LHA, LPRD Rd/87, Home Policy Sub-Committee, 'A Note on Dr Abrams' Survey', (September 1960), 3.

found it difficult to see working-class owner-occupation on equal terms with the expansion of council housing. The sense that suburban living in particular promoted Conservative habits would remain a constant fear in Labour circles. However, if place was the primary threat to working class allegiance in Labour eyes, the living environment of the wider urban area was something that could be controlled. In spite of these fears, a far-reaching investigation of car workers in the New Town of Luton from 1962 by the sociologist John Goldthorpe and a number of his colleagues found, decisively, that affluence there did not contribute to any change in voting habits.[80] Goldthorpe and his co-authors asserted that it was only the 'merest handful' of affluent workers who chose by dint of their new circumstances to withdraw their support from Labour.[81] As the previous chapter has shown, Labour sought to break down the old patterns of cities, to be replaced by a modern, utopian vision. In planning and developing council housing, Labour councils had the ability to deliver housing estates that could reflect their preconceptions of what a working-class area once was – or ought to be.

Paradoxically, the crisis of 'too much affluence' was followed by one of poverty. The continued existence of poverty in the welfare state had not been entirely overlooked, even if, as Black has suggested, the hegemony of affluence was such that poverty had been largely 'forgotten.'[82] The previous two chapters have dealt with the unedifying conditions in the private rented sector, the 'controlled' section of which housed those on relatively low incomes. An article by Young in 1954 had examined this, finding that: 'the parents with large families, the widows with children, the old people who object to having their rent paid by the Assistance Board, the men who often lose time through sickness, the workers in low-wage industries – these are the people who suffer from poverty in the Welfare State.'[83] This was a clear indictment of the shortcomings of the welfare state, with its design focused on eliminating absolute destitution in uniform family units rather than being adaptive enough to deal with those on the margins. Although convinced of the decline overall in primary, or absolute poverty, Crosland had suggested in 1956 that poverty could be a shifting

[80] John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The affluent worker in the class structure* (Cambridge 1969), 190.
[81] Ibid., 177.
[82] Black, 'The Impression of Affluence', 86.
[83] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (November 1954), 310.

designation: 'the numbers living in poverty at any given moment are an inadequate guide to the numbers which experience poverty at some period during their lives.'[84] In effect, Crosland was pointing out that poverty could be circumstantial, and even if Dickensian deprivation had been eliminated, any number of factors could cause poverty relative to one's surroundings.

In her examination of a 1956 social survey conducted in Liverpool, Selina Todd asserted that the evidence suggested that most respondents were not 'affluent', suggesting that many with unstable employment were vulnerable to periods of poverty.[85] Todd was in part challenging the historiographical primacy of Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend's *The Poor and the Poorest*, published in 1965. In an analysis of the Ministry of Labour's Family Expenditure Surveys of the early 1950s and early 1960s, Abel-Smith and Townsend suggested that poverty became concentrated within elderly households in the 1950s and 1960s, to the extent that 'old age constituted the largest single cause of poverty in Britain at this time.'[86] Although Todd has identified that working-class poverty was as much a feature of the 1950s and 1960s as working-class affluence, the fact that the old, and those with difficulties of income or large families lived in the private rented sector was significant. In a Fabian pamphlet of 1963, Abel-Smith wrote that housing was 'inequality in its most visible form.'[87] In Labour literature, the plight of those 'trapped' in poor housing conditions was a regular theme. In a *Labour Woman* article of February 1960, the author asked whether women's organisations should campaign for better accommodation for single persons. The author compared British housing programmes with those of the Netherlands, remarking that single persons' flatlets of 40 sq. m were built in some Dutch developments, complete with living room with both a curtained off sleeping recess and dining recess.[88] A further *Labour Woman* piece in April the same year noted the successful conversion of Victorian villas into flatlets for the elderly in Bedford, in an early recognition that turning 'old houses into new homes' whilst retaining housing standards was a real possibility.[89] The consequence of not providing suitable accommodation for single persons was

[84] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 46.
[85] Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street', 505.
[86] Gazeley, *Poverty in Britain*, 185.
[87] LSEA, Fabian Society, FABIAN/353, Brian Abel-Smith, *Freedom in the Welfare State* (1963), 9.
[88] LHA, *Labour Woman* (February 1960).
[89] LHA, *Labour Woman* (April 1960).

explored in a *Socialist Commentary* article of November 1964, entitled 'Bed-sitter Land'. In the piece, bedsits were characterised by tyrannical landladies and poor living standards, with desperate bedsitters were described as being anyone from the young to the very old.[90] Whilst this description of bedsitting was not without hyperbole, the dereliction of the private rented sector by the mid-1960s represented a serious check to Labour attempts to build modern cities. Although council housing was in some senses the response to poverty, the fact that many remained in poor financial circumstances, without access to council homes, demonstrated the difficulty of housing those in need.

Simply putting those deemed worthy into council housing was no sure way of reducing deprivation. Whilst depictions of marginalised groups in the 1960s have subsequently been highlighted as the flipside of affluence, Townsend in particular was well aware that the 'poor and poorest' were not simply the aged or the vulnerable. In a November 1966 lecture to the Fabian Society, Townsend noted that many poorer people did not qualify for council homes at all, or had to leave it for 'far worse and usually more costly' private rented housing.[91] This inequality of place would, Townsend believed, only get worse, with those in areas of bad housing exemplifying a new strand of impoverished alongside the more recognisable 'underclass'.[92] He expanded on this theme further in a 1967 presentation to the NEC Social Services Committee, suggesting that 'by the standards of the past more are prosperous; by the standards of today more may be poorer.'[93] Townsend's thoughts demonstrate how the complexity of poverty after 1945 could be seen as a rebuke to Labour preconceptions of how social policy could 'solve' deprivation. Simon Szreter has argued that the welfare state retained a class based design, but much of what caused poverty was left unchanged.[94] This was especially true of housing, with hardship at once less easily identifiable, with some evidence of affluence amongst the working classes, and yet a part of many working-class people's lives, as well as for those on the margins who had always gone overlooked.

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[90] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (November 1964), 23.
[91] LSEA, Fabian Society, FABIAN/371, Peter Townsend, *Poverty, socialism and Labour in power* (January 1967), 6.
[92] Ibid., 18.
[93] LHA, LPRD Re/296, Social Services Sub-Committee, Professor Peter Townsend, 'A Government Department of Social Planning: (A Review of Some Ways of Satisfying Needs and Obtaining Best Value for Money in Social Planning)', (April 1968), 4.
[94] Szreter, 'Health, Class, Place and Politics', 48-50.

More than any other, one loosely-defined group of people did not fit into Labour's conception of who council housing might be for. Around 290,000 Caribbean immigrants arrived in Britain between 1952 and 1961, followed and superseded by migrants from the Indian subcontinent, with numbers of 70-100,000 a year by the early 1960s.[95] Whilst the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants' Act restricted immigration to dependants of those already resident in Great Britain and to those in receipt of work permits, with a further 1968 Act limiting entry to British passport holders or to those whose parents/grandparents lived or were naturalised in Britain, the numbers were still relatively substantial.[96] Even the left-wing Labour MP Fenner Brockway, a staunch supporter of anti-discrimination measures, suggested in 1964 that he might be prepared to limit immigration until a major housebuilding programme had been completed.[97] As detailed in the previous chapter, immigrant groups became largely concentrated in 'blighted' private rented housing scheduled for slum clearance. Harold Carter has described how immigrant families only gained access to council estates in the London borough of Southwark in the 1970s, despite arriving in substantial numbers from the early 1960s.[98] Moreover, he notes that council housing was provided near-exclusively to the existing white working class, the Labour council seeing council homes as a kind of collective good to be distributed amongst 'their people'.[99] The additional low employment status of overseas immigrants ensured that on the whole they were precisely the kind of 'poorest' who ought to have been considered for council housing. Marcus Collins has described how Caribbean migrants in particular were often 'deskilled' as white employers offered them low status jobs, in spite of previous experience.[100] In this light, it is worth considering that council housing was a discriminatory tenure for the majority of the period 1945-70: most local authorities ensured that 'their people', not outsiders, gained council housing.

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[95] Tranter, *British Population in the Twentieth Century*, 30.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Dennis Dean, 'The Race Relations Policy of the First Wilson Government', *Twentieth Century British History*, 11:3 (2000), 259-283, 266.
[98] Carter, 'Building the Divided City', 173.
[99] Ibid., 162. Building upon this work, the social anthropologist Gillian Evans has observed that following their 1983 victory in the Bermondsey by-election and across the council wards, the Liberals (and then the Liberal Democrats) replicated a clientalist relationship between councillors and the white working classes through the distribution of housing and other public goods. Gillian Evans, ''The aboriginal people of England': the culture of class politics in contemporary Britain', *Focaal*, 62 (2012), 17-29 at 26.
[100] Marcus Collins, 'Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 40:3 (July 2001), 391-418 at 401-402.

This could extend to white migrants from across Britain – Margaret Stacey described in her study the 'nativism' of locally-born Banbury residents in the early 1950s, in competition for housing with at economic migrants from the Midlands and elsewhere.[101] Indeed, the very fact that public housing was built and distributed on a local basis led the Wilson government to initially hold off instructing local authorities to house immigrants, seeing it as a local matter.[102] Whilst several instances of discrimination in housing were described in the second chapter, by 1967 the issue was such that an edition of *Talking Points* discussed the matter in some detail. In the pamphlet, it was suggested that 'very few' immigrants were council housed, due to long periods of local residency required for a place on a waiting list.[103] A 1965 edition of the Labour councillors' newssheet *Partnership* noted that a 1955 Central Housing Advisory Committee Report had discouraged manipulation of the waiting list. *Partnership* explicitly stated it could be used in a racist manner, noting that 'ten years later, many councils retain residential qualifications of up to seven years before a person's name is allowed to go on the waiting list.'[104] Roy Hattersley remarked that Labour-controlled Birmingham used a housing questionnaire that asked: 'Did you serve in a Birmingham regiment during the war?' For Hattersley, this was akin to asking 'Are you white British?'[105] As has been suggested, the close concentration of overseas immigrants in inner city areas due to be demolished created a new form of visual poverty: in Birmingham, the number of immigrants moving into the central area was almost equal to the number of the indigenous population moving out.[106] By the 1970 general election, awareness of this process was such that Labour's manifesto included as a priority that there 'must be decent housing for everyone… immigrant ghettoes must not be allowed to develop.'[107] Whilst the conditions by which immigrant 'ghettoes' formed were complex and by no means limited to exclusion from council housing, separation from housing that was supposedly for 'the people' certainly played a part. In answering the question as to who council housing was for, it must be concluded

[101] Stacey, *Tradition and Change*, 166. The work for the study was carried out in the years 1949-51.
[102] Dean, 'Race Relations Policy', 268.
[103] LHA, *Talking Points* (26 May 1967), 5.
[104] LHA, LPRD, *Partnership*, 1:7 (October 1965).
[105] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[106] Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham*, 239.
[107] LHA, LP/GS/1, Labour Party, *Now Britain's strong let's make it great to live in* (1970), 4.

that for many Labour councillors, activists and party members it was clearly not overseas immigrants.

What was the class dynamic of council housing? In a debate in the House of Commons in February 1966, some indication was given of the political divide between Labour and the Conservatives on who it might be for. Responding to Conservative criticism of council house subsidies, the Labour MP for Ealing North, William Molloy, objected to the caricaturing of 'affluent tenants', noting that 'it would appear as though we cannot get near council estates because of the Rolls Royces and Jaguars.' He went on to assert that Labour believed that 'we want people to have welfare, not through a test, not through any examination, but because they are entitled to all the best their nation can give, simply because they are members of that nation, and for no other reason.'[108] As with the remaking of the housing market, slum clearance and town planning examined in this thesis so far, Labour pursued policy after 1945 in an attempt to right the wrongs of the past and to build a utopian, modern society. In terms of class and council housing, 'Labour modernity' was fundamentally a project for Labour's *perception* of the working classes. This perception was a poor, deserving, uniformly white, male grouping – and perhaps most importantly, a stable formation. Whilst Labour did sincerely attempt to make council housing a universal tenure as part of a more egalitarian drive to a classless society, there seems little doubt that the working classes took priority in the minds of most within Labour.

The issue with Labour's sense of the working class was that it cleaved to a caricature akin to the working men described by the social scientist Ferdynand Zweig in 1952. With his research based on casual conversations with workers, Zweig suggested that 'insecurity and fluidity' described working-class experience best.[109] This notion of the near-deprivation of the working classes informed Labour attitudes, even as they attempted to raise living standards through the provision of better housing. Though, as Todd in particular has described, vulnerability to poverty certainly did characterise working-class life throughout the post-war period, this was not true of all. Zweig went on to remark that whilst solely working-class districts still existed, the

[108] *Hansard*, (Commons), 725, (23 February 1966), 420-558, accessed online 14 June 2016 at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1966/feb/23/welfare-state.
[109] Ferdynand Zweig, *The British Worker* (London, 1952), 21.

differences between the working and middle classes were reducing, and 'council houses…are getting rid of the class barriers.'[110] This was true for at least a time – as has been discussed, council houses would eventually reinforce class barriers – and council houses were for Labour a key marker of the state of working-class affluence, as they perceived it. If their commitment to an egalitarian vision of council housing was laudable, the revisionist wing of Labour were fatally mistaken in the dubious belief, expressed across a variety of party literature, that affluence had changed working-class values to a degree unfavourable to Labour and moreover made the working classes far too middle-class to reside on council estates.

Equally, though it would be erroneous to suggest that poverty had been 'forgotten' by Labour – the 1950s and 1960s debates around slum clearance and the private rented sector are evidence that this was not entirely the case – an *impression* of growing societal affluence did blindside Labour to the impoverishment of others. Poor living conditions and insecurity persisted for the elderly, single people and for many working-class families, as well as for the growing population of overseas immigrants – the latter being actively shut out of the council housed utopia. It would be wrong to understate the extent of the change for those who did gain council homes or the significance attached to it – as Judy Giles has asserted, for many this must have been seen as 'a long overdue recognition of their right to the benefit of progress.'[111] In spite of this, the pervasive understanding that council homes were for those less well-off became the defining feature of it as a form, stymieing grander modern visions of classless estates. Richard Rodger has observed that this was particularly the case with higher rise developments, noting that public housing 'became a highly visible means of perpetuating class divisions.'[112] The all-encompassing character of Labour visions of modernity faltered in part on a limited conception of who the working classes were and how a welfare state should operate in a supposedly affluent era.

[110] Ibid., 205-207.
[111] Giles, *Parlour and the Suburb*, 50.
[112] Richard Rodger, 'Slums and Suburbs: The Persistence of Residential Apartheid', in Philip Waller (ed.) *The English Urban Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), 233-268 at 263.

Defining Modern Communities: Labour and the social sciences

Whilst a sense of who modern homes were for informed the unifying logic of Labour housing policy, it is also necessary to consider what sort of communities the party aimed to build. The reaction against 'Victorian' cities was in part based on the belief that stronger, healthier communities could be created through careful planning, and that changing the urban living environment from the narrow confines of the slum to the open space and easy conviviality of modern estates was of paramount importance. Labour interest in 'community' as a concept paralleled, and to some degree was influenced by, the fascination of architects, planners and social scientists with the subject. The notion that community could be designed, built and tinkered with was accepted wisdom in the mid-twentieth century. Although as noted in previous chapters, Labour had tended to be suspicious of the Garden City movement, the key idea driving this process of building 'community' might be said to be that of Raymond Unwin, who believed that 'social cohesion…could be encouraged through the visual coherence of a place.'[113] Of course, as the previous section has discussed, Labour's own archetypal good community was in the first instance a working-class community. This assertion of a 'traditional' model of community became more and more bound up with modernity – Jeremy Seabrook and Trevor Blackwell saw the irony in that 'the predominance of the concept of community arose at the very moment of the dissolution of certain aspects of its reality.'[114] In addition, Joanna Bourke suggested that an all-encompassing vision of 'community' was not necessarily positive, pointing out that a 'focus on the "community"' could be to the detriment of 'both minority groups and individual action.'[115] Moreover, whilst the idealism of Labour members should not be doubted, it is the case that Labour aimed primarily to build a 'political community', distinct from an actual community – their interest was in creating a better society, but preferably one that would also vote for them.[116] Conversely, social scientists were concerned with investigating the reasons for societal change and at the same time recommending their own vision of a good society on the basis of their research. Nonetheless, the work of some social

[113] Beach and Tiratsoo, 'The Planners and the Public', 528.
[114] Blackwell and Seabrook, *A World Still To Win*, 109.
[115] Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, 151.
[116] Forester, *Labour Party and the Working Class*, 101.

investigators, such as Young, had a considerable effect on Labour thought, whilst the work of other social scientists stands as a contrast to, or even rebuttal, of Labour beliefs on how society could be formed. What did Labour consider to have made a good community? And what practical effect did this have on housing policy?

Although the next section will review the importance of architectural design in creating an impression of 'Labour modernity', the physical space of a given neighbourhood was of some significance to those wishing to create ideal communities. Throughout the preceding chapter, Labour's growing attempt in the 1950s and 1960s to combat urban 'sprawl' and spatial isolation through the denouement of suburbs in favour of integrated New Towns and higher-density estates has been explored. Between the wars, the extensive development of 'out-country' suburban estates in the areas surrounding London by the LCC, replicated in cities across Britain, was accompanied by limited multi-storey flat development in some cities. The most significant of the latter kind of developments was Quarry Hill in Leeds, built by the city's Labour council from 1934 to 1938, with a circular design based on the vast Karl-Marx Hof in Vienna.[117] Housing around 3,000 residents and planned to be complete with shops, a nursery and even gardens for cultivation, Quarry Hill was a 'self-contained estate, as a self-conscious exercise in model housing and town planning.'[118] However, Charles Jenkinson, the Leeds Housing Committee Chair, saw the estate as a 'decanting centre' for people moving to cottage estates 'which he believed every right-minded person would prefer.'[119] Leeds, like most other 1930s councils whether Labour-run or otherwise, therefore continued to build suburban council estates – with large-scale private 'ribbon development' proceeding at a far greater rate. By the end of the 1930s, social scientists and planners had begun to question whether large-scale suburban estates had 'failed' as communities. Ruth Durant argued in her survey of Watling that the estate was little more than a 'colony', lacking community spirit, which she appeared to suggest could be measured by the success of the estate's community centre.[120] Equally, Rosamund Jevons and John Madge were critical of suburban council estates in Bristol and believed they had not

[117] Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat', 133.
[118] Ibid., 146.
[119] Ibid., 126.
[120] Durant, *Watling*, 34 and 117.

been designed to encourage social cohesion.[121] The approach of Labour after the war, whilst initially retaining a preference for the cottage estate, would seek to create community in a way that redressed these issues of dislocation and congeniality.

'Community' is a term that escapes simple definition. When asked about what might make a good community in a 2014 interview, the Labour MP for Leeds Central and at that time Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government, Hillary Benn, suggested: 'it's about the relationships people have with each other…do you know your neighbour, do you say hello to your neighbour, do they say hello to you… do you contribute in the local community, do you volunteer.'[122] Benn's assessment was based on an ideal of sociable 'neighbourliness', with an element of voluntarism in it. Whilst it could be said that this has become the accepted model of 'community' in the present day, it also bears some relation to Patricia Garside's description of the Sutton Trust's model estates, in which she contrasted the 'associational' character of the estates against 'prosaic' council estates.[123] Garside claimed that whilst Sutton Trust estates had developed an active voluntarist ethos, due to the lack of bureaucratic interference from a local council, attempts to mould council estates to a 'community ideal' had not worked.[124] Though it seems unlikely that the Sutton Trust was not trying to encourage any sort of 'community ideal' on its own model estates, the caricature that had arisen of fastidious, 'snooping' municipal management of council estates was all too real. Indeed, James MacColl wrote in 1954 that housing managers could be 'far too restriction minded, no doubt because the tradition that the Council tenant is a slum denizen with enough to be thankful for without expecting to enjoy himself.'[125]

One article in a 1952 Labour paper attempted to 'consult' public opinion, albeit narrowly. In the piece entitled 'Just what is a community?', a host of 'characters' on a council estate were introduced, indicated by photographs, including a parson, a gas worker, a housewife, an engine-driver, a factory girl, a bus driver and an engineer.[126] All wanted slightly different things, but the article

[121] Jevons and Madge, *Housing Estates*, 54.
[122] Interview with Hillary Benn MP, Telephone (17 June 2014). At the time of writing, Benn is now Shadow Foreign Secretary.
[123] Garside, 'Citizenship, civil society and quality of life', 260-263.
[124] Ibid., 269.
[125] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 26.
[126] LHA, LP/GS/8, *People's Pictorial*, 1:3 (1952), 2-3.

cautioned ‘don’t just think the people who live on Tom’s [engine-driver] estate are only a lot of discontented grumblers. They’re not. You see, every one of their grumbles is an individual part which fits into the jigsaw puzzle.’[127] Whilst the parson wanted a greater focus on family life, claiming that the ‘bricks and mortar of their surroundings mould character’, the gas worker wanted more shops, a technical college for adult learning, and football pitches as ‘he feels that teams of local people playing on nearby pitches brings a great amount of community spirit to a neighbourhood.’[128] The comments of each of the estate ‘characters’ are revealing of the two seemingly divergent attributes ascribed to community in the post-war era. On one level, as the parson suggested, community involved turning inward to a home-centred lifestyle, but promoted a wholesome environment in doing so. In contrast, the ‘community spirit’ that the gas worker desired appeared to involve a more performative type of community, with street life being a part of it. Although these two conditions of community were not, and are not, mutually exclusive by necessity, there was nevertheless a tension between them. Whilst there was considerable nuance to the way that people within the party expressed their views, Labour generally wanted communities to be more ‘active’ citizens and less home-centred, as the latter was believed inimical to a socialist society. Closely related to this belief, but distinct, was what might be described as the ‘social science’ view of community, strongly advanced by Michael Young. As has been noted, Young was highly influential in the field of sociology, and argued that as well as active citizenship, preserving and replicating family-based community was of utmost importance.[129] Where the two lines of thought tended to coalesce was in the belief that ‘withdrawing’ from the community into the home indicated a less successful community: this supposition would have far-reaching effects on housing policy.

Sociological investigation into new housing estates drew attention to the rapid change in living conditions, particularly amongst working-class people. Leo Kuper’s 1953 study of a suburban council estate in Houghton outside Coventry drew particular attention to the inhabitants’ desire for privacy. Houghton comprised a mixture of low-rise 1930s council housing and newer

[127] Ibid, 3.
[128] Ibid., 4-5.
[129] Butler, ‘Michael Young’, 206.

steel prefabs set in a 'neighbourhood unit', factory-produced by the British Iron and Steel Federation, and arranged in cul-de-sacs with houses facing one another.[130] In part due to the novelty of the prefabs, Kuper mainly interviewed residents from one prefab cul-de-sac, Braydon Road, and found the thinness of the partition walls between semi-detached houses was of some concern to residents. Kuper observed that the 'inability to control noises within the house' could cause anxiety or irritation between neighbours, with examples of noises as 'bronchial coughs, babies crying at night, or a Welsh husband who joins in with singing on the wireless.'[131] In addition, the cul-de-sac design and large windows of prefab houses meant that 'for a person sensitive to neighbours' reactions the effect may be rather like the telescreen described by Orwell in his novel *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*.'[132] Conversely, Julian Holder has asserted that post-war prefabs were seen by families as an improvement on homes shared with relatives, claiming that 'in postwar Britain, any notion of collective living was not considered an appropriate reward for victory.'[133] Kuper did allow for the fact that some residents of Braydon Road were not bothered by the fact that people could see into their gardens, noting 'people vary in their requirements for privacy', and it seems probable that for most residents a prefab was a considerable advance on their previous circumstances in Coventry.[134]

John Mogey was similarly critical of the 1930s council estate layout of Barton, in Oxford, commenting that the 'unimaginative layout…has an unintended result in dividing the area into several sections.'[135] Like many of his peers, Mogey was a Labour supporter and was, like Young, a contributor to *Socialist Commentary*. Mogey noted the absence of corner shops, cafes or fish shops where casual contact between neighbours could be made, in contrast to the older Oxford district of St Ebbes, from which a large number of Barton residents had been rehoused.[136] Perhaps tellingly, Mogey found that 'the housing-estate family developed a much more critical attitude to their much superior house', but 70% of those who criticised their council house did not

[130] Kuper, 'Blueprint for Living Together', 7-13.
[131] Ibid., 15-16.
[132] Ibid., 22.
[133] Julian Holder, 'The Nation State or the United States? The Irresistible Kitchen of the British Ministry of Works, 1944 to 1951' in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (eds.), *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users* (Cambridge MT, 2009), 235-258, 251.
[134] Kuper, 'Blueprint for Living Together', 28.
[135] Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, 12.
[136] Ibid., 87.

want to return to St Ebbe's.[137] Mogey conceded that, contrary to his expectations, though St Ebbe's was presumed to be friendlier 'its inhabitants keep themselves aloof from neighbourly contact' whilst at Barton 'most people know their immediate neighbours.'[138] Nonetheless, indicating the tone of much sociological investigation in the 1950s, Mogey claimed that Barton lacked 'social cohesion' due to its 'middle class' design.[139] This attitude towards newer housing developments that they did not create community in a successful manner through ignorance of the rhythms of urban life was partly a critique of the suburban lifestyle and partly based on a conception of class-based community, as the previous section has explored. Labour were drawn to both of these critiques, fearful as they were of the supposedly bourgeois characteristics of suburbs, and accommodating of a belief that Labour was fundamentally a working-class movement. As will be seen, Labour received and reinterpreted aspects of the views of the social scientists in their own attempts to build modern communities.

Throughout the 1950s, Labour internally reassessed their housing policy, gradually pushing for a much wider extension of council housing via the policy of municipalisation, as Chapters One and Two have reviewed. With the assumption that Labour would be in government again by the close of the decade, combined with local authority programmes of urban slum clearance in large cities – a number of which were run by Labour councils – the party addressed some of the issues of housing development that had become apparent since 1945. In terms of council housing, James MacColl warned in 1954 that tenants did not take kindly to 'fussy paternalism' in council estate management, and that they may find it difficult living under 'even a benevolent Leviathan.'[140] In addition to instances of heavy-handed supervision, Michael Young claimed that 'community spirit suffers' on new housing estates in a *Socialist Commentary* piece of September 1954.[141] Though as mentioned in the second chapter, Young's principal target of this piece was the New Towns, given his comparative work in Bethnal Green and the Essex overspill estate of Debden from 1953, he almost certainly had suburban estates in mind too. He

[137] Ibid., 73-4.
[138] Ibid., 92.
[139] Ibid., 124.
[140] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 23-4.
[141] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (September 1954), 252.

went on to claim that community spirit was relational, suggesting that people in the same streets 'adjust themselves to each other like plants in a garden.'[142] In this regard, Young cautioned that though community spirit would return over time, it took a generation or more to do so – and so uprooting established communities for new estates was a risky endeavour. Young's views on the subject had developed through his work with the Institute of Community Studies (ICS), which he founded in 1953 with fellow sociologists Peter Townsend, Peter Willmott and Peter Marris, though he had registered his unease with large-scale housing projects in his 1949 Labour pamphlet *Small Man, Big World*.[143] In his reappraisal of *Small Man, Big World* in the 'different mental climate' of the 1950s with a 1956 piece for *Socialist Commentary*, Young observed that 'we once thought that the town planner and the architect had the magic wands in their hands', but believed that new settlements were 'the most dreary places in the world, lacking individuality or character.'[144]

Young and his co-collaborator Willmott would go on to expand on this in *Family and Kinship* when it was published in 1957, claiming that the strength of working-class community was dependent on tradition and close contact between relatives: the anthropological notion of 'kinship' networks. However, whilst Young and Willmott recognised the desire of people in Bethnal Green to have a 'home of one's own', those who had obtained one in Debden were believed to, or accused others of 'keeping themselves to themselves.'[145] In the introduction to Debden, termed 'Greenleigh' in *Family and Kinship*, Young and Willmott characterised the estate as lacking 'the sociable squash of people and houses, workshops and lorries' that they had found in Bethnal Green.[146] Without the presence of kin to serve as a bridge to meeting and interacting with others, due to the fact that Debden was primarily composed of younger families, Young and Willmott asserted that it would never become a community as robust as Bethnal Green.[147] *Family and Kinship* was well received, with a May 1957 *Socialist Commentary* review by the Labour council grandee Peggy Jay, in which she remarked upon Young and Willmott's description of some Debden residents' desire to get back to the 'grime, the noise and the overcrowding' of

[142] Ibid.
[143] Butler, 'Michael Young', 205.
[144] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (July 1956), 17.
[145] Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, 35 and 147.
[146] Ibid., 122.
[147] Ibid., 169.

Bethnal Green.[148] Whilst Jay felt that the authors should give 'credit where credit's due' on the material quality of suburban council housing, she agreed with Young and Willmott that 'skilful architecture and designs cannot create a community.'[149] In effect, 'community' was in Young and Willmott's view something primarily formed by family and class – and in spite of Jay's assessment on design, it would seem a relatively high density living environment also played a part.

Young and Willmott's belief in the importance of family and an established living environment was further stated in their later survey of the middle-class suburb of Woodford, published as *Family and Class in a London Suburb* in 1960. In Woodford – a primarily middle-class area but with the working-class residents numbering around a third of the population – Young and Willmott observed that 'the move outwards is also a move upwards.'[150] However, far from creating a 'mixed class' community, in Young and Willmott's view class differences were accentuated in Woodford: one such example was the comment of a Woodford resident that '…some of them [East-Enders] are, well, without being snobby, they seem to me to be just a little bit lower.'[151] Equally, family life was determined not to have flourished in the same way as it had done in the East End, though by contrast to Debden, Young and Willmott reported that people believed that they belonged to a friendly community 'almost as unanimously as the people of Bethnal Green.'[152] There remained, nonetheless, the judgment that the one-class, closely packed Bethnal Green was a more effective community than the suburb or council estate, due to the supposed easy association of family and class. The reviewer of *Family and Class* for *Socialist Commentary* in January 1961 agreed on this point, noting that the 'quality' of social life in new suburbs was unclear but likely inferior to that of older areas.[153] Similarly, *Labour Woman*'s reviewer felt that 'snobbish beyond belief' Woodford compared poorly to 'whole-hearted Bethnal Green', which may of course have been Young and Willmott's intention.[154] Most pertinent to Labour actors was the comment of *Tribune*'s reviewer in December

[148] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (May 1957), 24.
[149] Ibid., 24-27.
[150] Young and Willmott, *Family and Class*, 3.
[151] Ibid., 6.
[152] Ibid., 103.
[153] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1961), 22.
[154] LHA, *Labour Woman* (January 1961), 15.

1960, who suggested that *Family and Class* emphasised the 'futility' of the 'Crosland-Jay-Morrison doctrine of watering down our principles to appeal to the middle classes.'[155] If suburbia produced and reproduced Tory snobbery, then there was little point in creating more of it.

What was needed, according to this view, was not a 'middle class' way of living but similar patterns of life in better living conditions. Margaret Stacey made a similar point in her study of Banbury, identifying that 'where there is a mixture of social-status groups in one street, members of one group draw together and away from others.'[156] John Mogey expressed this view in a 1958 article on the welfare state, claiming that 'social services, properly envisaged, are valuable political tools for remodelling our society so that socialist principles of equality, dignity and brotherhood can be more fully realized.'[157] Some elements of Labour saw these principles as being best realised by greater tenants' democracy on council estates, with the Co-operative Party suggesting in a 1959 pamphlet that 'housing to us is not only an exercise in planning and building techniques – it is an exercise in democracy – in government *by* as well as *for* the people.'[158] Correspondingly, MacColl recommended a less officious and less centralised form of management on housing estates, and allowing everything 'until a specific nuisance was established.'[159] By the close of the 1950s, it was both a Labour and social science perception that the suburb as a planned settlement was not promoting community in the desired fashion. Writing the lead article for a 1959 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, the magazine's editor Rita Hinden observed that 'present-day apathy' could be attributed to 'the degeneration of proud local communities into amorphous, anonymous suburbs in which no one counts, and almost no one belongs.'[160] A further article of 1959 written by the sociologist Geoffrey Gibson went still further, claiming that the greatest expression of popular feeling was a 'common hostility' towards development corporation officers trying to foster community spirit.[161] Contra Mogey, Gibson argued that people could not be planned and in effect the best government could do to encourage community would be to leave

[155] LSEA, *Tribune* (2 December 1960), 8.
[156] Stacey, *Tradition and Change*, 107, 177.
[157] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (August 1958), 16.
[158] LHA, Co-operative Party, *Housing*, 20.
[159] LHA, MacColl, *Plan For Rented Houses*, 21-23.
[160] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1959), 12.
[161] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (April 1959), 13.

people to it.[162] Whilst, given the paternalism inherent in Labour political culture, this entirely hands off approach seemed unlikely, the notion that community was best served by suburban housing developments was certainly unfashionable in party circles by the end of the 1950s. Where Labour interpreted the views of the social scientists was in the surprising 'emergence of a belief that the modern block of flats, as such, can generate community feelings.'[163] The issue was that Labour's vision of communitarian socialism invoked a fixed vision of what 'community' was and should be – which was to prove inflexible when it did not come to pass.

Perhaps most importantly, the interpretation of community offered by Young and Willmott did not go uncontested. The sociologist Hannah Gavron approached the subject in an essay of May 1962, declaring that 'one of the fashions now current in British Sociology, and more particularly among the left of the Labour Party, is to sentimentalize working-class life.'[164] Gavron claimed that this tendency to romanticise had resulted in the creation of 'Hoggartsville', 'a world brimming over with extended family life, warmth and neighbourliness.'[165] As has been discussed, this belief in an idealised working-class existence underpinned much of the thinking on community in the period: Labour's vision of modernity drew its strength from the conviction that the solidarity of the working classes could be transposed to futuristic new landscapes. This rested on the assumption that social scientists such as Young and Willmott were correct, and that 'community' in the manner described by their writings was a genuine alternative to the perceived inadequacies of the suburb or the council estate. Yet Young and Willmott's findings may not have been entirely novel. Lise Butler has asserted that *Family and Kinship* was a 'deliberate intellectual and political project to show the continued importance of the extended family in industrial society.'[166] Through the study of Young and Willmott's field notes for the project, Lawrence has argued that 'if *Family and Kinship* was powerful politics, it was poor sociology', finding numerous instances of respondents far less positive about the extended family.[167] In this

[162] Ibid.
[163] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 113.
[164] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (May 1962), 19. Gavron worked on the lives of lonely mothers, her work being published posthumously after her 1965 suicide as *The Captive Wife*.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Butler, 'Michael Young', 224.
[167] Lawrence, 'Inventing the 'Traditional Working Class'', 592.

regard, Young and Willmott's work fits more easily into a bibliography of anti-planning literature, such as that of Jane Jacobs, and Lawrence regards this as its principal strength.[168]

Examining a 'blighted and partly blitzed' area of inner-city Liverpool in the mid-1950s, a group of sociologists led by Charles Vereker were able to look at a mixture of housing districts under threat from slum clearance, as well as a council estate of 1930s low-rise flats which had been tenanted by families relocated from other parts of Liverpool subjected to slum clearance.[169] Vereker and his colleagues observed that 'a point which the sociologist is able to clarify for the town planner' is that longstanding communities did not necessarily want to stay put, with their findings being that most residents of longer-term communities also were the most desirous of moving.[170] The discovery that the most transient population of the districts was the most settled of the communities prompted Vereker and his colleagues to warn against assessing a community purely on 'the firmness of its roots,' given that the inhabitants might have 'different aspirations' for the future, as well as recommending that social scientists and town planners worked in close co-operation.[171] Considering Vereker's survey as well as a 1960s study of a suburban estate to which some of the inner-city Liverpudlians were relocated, Selina Todd noted that the experience of class-conscious community was not specific to place – whilst social change occurred, most people appeared to remain working class.[172] Indeed, in his study of the giant Becontree estate in Dagenham, forty years after its creation, Peter Willmott was surprised to find that it had taken on an 'East End' character, noting that 'most people are still unmistakeably cockneys.'[173] Whilst he identified the main problem of the estate as the failure to plan for population increase, meaning that some of the second generation had to move away, Willmott concluded that Dagenham maintained 'a way of life…that satisfies most people.'[174] Mark Clapson has remarked that 'suburban sociability and community life was and remains nuanced', claiming that a comparatively

[168] Ibid.
[169] Charles Vereker, John Barron Mays, Elizabeth Gittus and Maurice Broady, *Urban Redevelopment and Social Change: A Study of Social Conditions in Central Liverpool 1955-56* (Liverpool, 1961), 3 and 32.
[170] Ibid., 94.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street', 510.
[173] Willmott, *Evolution of a Community*, 19.
[174] Ibid., 110.

less obvious pattern of life, as well as the anti-suburban trend in intellectual circles, prompted new developments to be labelled un-neighbourly.[175]

One interesting example of this was the perception of pubs, which Gibson had particularly singled out in his 1958 attack on New Towns, claiming that 'pubs, which I have always regarded as a fairly reliable barometer of community spirit, are, in the New Towns, unfriendly, "chromium-plated", and empty.'[176] One has to question how reliable Gibson's barometer truly was – and how much it might have been based on an assumption of working-class habits. In *Family and Class*, Young and Willmott lamented the fact the pubs of Woodford were 'not small cosy bars of the Bethnal Green type, filled with the cheerful jangle of a honky-tonk piano or a twanging juke-box.'[177] As early as 1952, Ferdynand Zweig claimed that for London workers 'the pub life of Britain is definitely on the decline', but attributed this as much to the development of working men's clubs with a wider range of entertainment as to the popularity of cinemas, sports and the 'high price of beer and spirits.'[178] Kuper had made a similar observation in Houghton, with one of his respondents asserting that 'the [working men's] club is not a low dump like the local pub…we like a drink, but not that boozy atmosphere.'[179] This being said, Peter Shapely has recounted that Labour councils in particular could slip into the 'Victorian philanthrophic impulse' to control working-class habits, and refuse to build pubs on places like the Wythenshawe estate.[180] Nevertheless, Clare Langhamer has remarked that whilst home-centred leisure might have increased during the period, the less prominent position of the pub did not necessarily translate to a lack of community.[181] It may have instead been the case that an over-focus on the pub as an instrument of community vitality reflected instead a limited cultural conception of working-class life.

Somewhat ironically, in the eyes of social scientists a perceived lack of community became as true of the more strikingly modern, higher-rise developments aimed at solving the issues supposedly present on suburban estates. Though some estates such as Park Hill in Sheffield actively aimed to

[175] Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration', 167.
[176] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (April 1959), 13.
[177] Young and Willmott, *Family and Class*, 95.
[178] Zweig, *The British Worker*, 138.
[179] Kuper, 'Blueprint for Living Together', 123.
[180] Shapely, *Politics of Housing*, 118.
[181] Langhamer, 'Meanings of Home', 352.

recreate the 'warmth of the slum' in the new development, to the extent they retained old street names on the estate, most were more straightforward affairs.[182] Investigating the creation of a multi-storey council estate on the older working-class area of Barton Hill in Bristol with blocks up to fifteen storeys high, created in order to reduce the numbers relocated to an 'overspill estate', Hilda Jennings claimed that the new flats were considered 'unnatural' to 'apparently the great majority.'[183] She did, however, acknowledge that 'the separate storeys in many cases soon became units of social life.'[184] Jennings' belief that the old Barton Hill had been 'an associative type of society' led her to conclude that a better means of facilitating contacts between neighbours should be established, as she claimed that residents of the tower blocks wanted the 'non-material satisfactions associated with the old areas.'[185] Similarly, in his defence of an area of Sunderland faced with redevelopment by high-rise flats, Norman Dennis claimed that 'informants feared the loss of a neighbourhood in which all families embraced a similar style of life.'[186] However, there were few comprehensive sociological studies of modern, high-rise housing actually conducted during this period: most social scientists tended to report anecdotal dislike for flats, much as they did for suburban homes.

The most far-reaching of these was Pearl Jephcott's 1971 study *Homes in High Flats*, which explored five high-rise estates in Glasgow, ranging from the large Castlemilk estate with a population of 40,000 and nearly five miles from the Glasgow city centre, to the iconic Red Road estate, closer to the centre but 'curiously cut off from the main stream of city life.'[187] Jephcott took considerable interest in the community life of the high-rise estates. She found that although formal associational life was not especially present, in addition to their duties representing tenants to the council, a tenants' association on one estate replicated the 'welfare' activities of the old street, with fathers organising bus trips to Saturday morning children's cinemas to give mothers time to shop, OAP outings and 'a steamer trip to Arran.'[188] In spite of this dynamism, Jephcott observed that organised groups were limited by 'a lack of suitable places in

[182] Hollow, 'Governmentality on the Park Hill estate', 128.
[183] Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 191.
[184] Ibid., 198.
[185] Ibid., 240.
[186] Dennis, *People and Planning*, 264-5.
[187] Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 29-30.
[188] Ibid., 48-49.

which to meet', with some attempting to use lift halls and in one case 'a tiny, cold, unventilated caretaker's storeroom', and she was not convinced of the ability of high flats to provide for active community life.[189] In some ways, Jephcott's study provides a useful epilogue for the discussion on 'community' in the period 1945-70. Though architects, planners and Labour in particular adapted to sociological assumptions that suburban life had 'failed' to create community – or at least a *perception* of 'warm' working-class community – by trying to keep communities together in developments of increasingly high density, this was still found insufficient. Notwithstanding the deficiencies of high flats, which will be explored in the next section, 'community' as conceived by Labour and a number of social scientists of the period could not be located as it had never existed in the first place.

Considering the changes to British society since 1945, the academic Raymond Williams wrote in 1961 that 'we think of the new housing estates, the new suburbs and the new towns as characteristic of the new Britain.'[190] As has been demonstrated, many within Labour, as well as left-leaning social scientists, were unconvinced and even suspicious of this new Britain. Yet Williams was prescient when he went on to suggest that in spite of the disruption of extended families in relocation to council estates, suburbs or new towns, 'we cannot be sure exactly what will happen, but it would be rash to assume that all former patterns are permanently gone.'[191] Nonetheless, this was precisely the point at which both Labour and most social scientists investigating community started. Informed by a belief that 'affluence' had decisively shifted working-class behaviour away from an idealised norm, as well as by the notion that the physical space of new housing developments inhibited community formation, most accounts expressed a sense of futility. This was a misplaced sense of pessimism: Ben Jones has discussed how social networks were largely reconstituted in suburban housing estates, with a 'subtle shift' towards the home.[192] For many working-class families, this was a welcome shift. Hoggart had recalled of Hunslet, 'home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living room on to the street', and plenty of people must have

[189] Ibid., 116.
[190] Williams, *Long Revolution*, 359.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Jones, *The working class*, 146-147.

welcomed the increased privacy of new homes.[193] Whilst Young certainly identified a closeness of family and the importance of informal networks in working-class community relations, he was mistaken in his belief that their existence meant, ergo, that the working classes of Bethnal Green wanted to stay put. Vereker and his colleagues were comparatively more prudent in their judgement on the slums of Liverpool, contending that 'past gains need not be sacrificed wholesale to supposed future trends nor must the warmth and intimacy of certain families' lives prevent a determined effort to refurbish the physical environment.'[194]

In spite of alternative points of view to this, and the findings of researchers such as Kuper and Mogey that suburban housing estates were appreciated rather more by their residents than might have been expected, it should not be understated that Michael Young was the sociologist with the closest connection to Labour. As part of the 'revisionist milieu' – both a contributor of *Socialist Commentary* and its parent body the Socialist Union, as well as a member of the intellectual elite of the Labour right – Young had a line of influence into Labour unparalleled by most in the field of sociology.[195] Whilst this did not necessarily mean that Young's ideas were taken up by Labour, it would be reasonable to say that his conception of community and Labour's broader belief in an ideal community were part of a fraternity of views on the subject, flowing into one another throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, Labour's solution to the question of how community might be preserved, or at least less disrupted through urban transformation, was radically different to Young's. Rather than preserving communities in their exact form, in the same terraces, some of the more ambitious modern estate designs adopted by Labour councils attempted to incorporate the rhythms of the street into the blocks of flats. More crudely, and more commonly, Labour councils built vertically with less architectural creativity in order to ensure that communities could be rehoused in the same place. Both Jennings and Jephcott identified issues arising from this form of development, not least that high-rise blocks reduced communal spaces for informal contact – though they did both suggest that residents liked their new homes.

[193] Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 58.
[194] Vereker, Mays, Gittus and Broady, *Urban Redevelopment and Social Change*, 119-120.
[195] Black, 'Social Democracy as a Way of Life', 515 and 520.

The politics of design will be discussed further in the following section, but on the question of how community might be built, Labour and the social scientists generally departed from one another. In a 2013 interview, Roy Hattersley remarked that he, like Young and others, believed working-class community to have changed in the affluent age, suggesting that 'in the sixties, they either wanted to do it [speak to neighbours] or sentimentally thought they wanted to do it. By the seventies, they bloody well knew they didn't want to do that, they wanted to sit at home and watch television.'[196] Hattersley's perspective exemplifies the nuance of home life which Labour missed. Whilst a particular form of working-class life might have passed into history, the rise of home-orientated lifestyles did not preclude 'community'. The failure of Labour to recognise this in the 1950s and 1960s led to the party supporting a form of housing and modicum of community design which did not align with tenant desires.

The Politics of Progressive Design: Modern architecture and socialism

In his conclusion to *The Future of Socialism*, Tony Crosland sounded a call for socialists to throw their weight behind building sophisticated communities imbued with a sort of *joie du vivre*. He wrote that British life needed a greater sense of culture and gaiety, with

> …more open-air cafes, brighter and gayer streets at night, later closing-hours for public houses…more murals and pictures in public places, better designs for furniture and pottery and women's clothes, statues in the centre of new housing-estates...[197]

Crosland fundamentally implied a communitarian vision of a newly affluent society: people had more money to spend, but they would joyously spend their income in public places. Whether this inspiring notion of a truly collective society could come to pass in housing policy – or indeed, was in any sense realistic – was another matter entirely. At the same time as conjuring up a vision of Europeanised congeniality, Crosland also pointed to an aesthetically

[196] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (7 July 2013).
[197] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 522.

distinct modern utopia. This would most often take the form of a modern flat of rationalised design (though sometimes a house), presented as a solution to the problems of the age. In particular, the modern flat was believed to be able to satisfy what Clare Langhamer has described as 'a cross-class dream of attaining a 'home of one's own.''[198] Whilst politicians from across the spectrum were entranced by the possibilities of modernism, the Labour Party were exceptionally susceptible to a 'tendency to eulogise non-traditional housing and, by implication, draw attention to the progressiveness of social policy.'[199] Reflecting on the previous section, the higher density living environment of modern housing was also thought to encourage the sort of community life Labour believed to be a part of a good society. In effect, the modern flat attempted to do two things: firstly, to distribute the trappings of modern homes that Labour believed the working classes deserved; and secondly, to serve as an active demonstration of the modern future, encouraging the citizenry to embrace socialist utopia.

It is of some importance to comprehend the context in which modern housing became seen as the answer to the issues thrown up by urban transformation. It may be best summarised as one in which 'the ruling aesthetic' was 'light and space.'[200] Indeed, in an early appraisal of the multi-storey boom in 1974, E.W. Cooney stated that this ideological attachment almost certainly pushed architectural development beyond relatively modest four storey tenements to grander modern projects.[201] Conversely, in the same volume Anthony Sutcliffe struggled to make sense of the popularity of the flat form, claiming that 'the standard of accommodation offered by the English flat has always been markedly inferior to the separate cottage or villa.'[202] However, Glendinning and Muthesius have pointed out that 'it became necessary to attribute to the flat some specific, desirable characteristics' in order to move beyond arguments about whether flats or houses were better.[203] One of these characteristics was the idea that flats could provide 'modern amenities' more effectively than traditional houses. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann have

[198] Langhamer, 'Meanings of Home', 347.
[199] Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory*, 45.
[200] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 51.
[201] E.W. Cooney, 'High Flats in Local Authority Housing in England and Wales since 1945' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London, 1974), 151-180, 156.
[202] Sutcliffe, 'Introduction', 2.
[203] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 25.

focused their attention on the significance of the modern kitchen, noting that it 'was a key modernist indicator for society's civilization in the twentieth century.'[204] The material design of the home was characterised as simplifying housework for the housewife, offering the possibility of empowerment. Labour took on this rhetoric and fitted it into a wider dialogue of a modern, socialist future. More than anything else, for Labour housing was 'the gateway to health, education, higher domestic standards.'[205] In this regard, the modern flat was the harbinger of the socialist mission to replace the iniquities of 'then' with the social equilibrium of 'now'.

As has been explained previously, Labour were not wholly entranced by the modern flat during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. In a 1943 pamphlet, Birmingham Labour Party came out against the flat explicitly, arguing that 'flats are generally unsatisfactory from the point of view of the happy family life, especially where there are young children.'[206] It is likely that the Birmingham Labour were thinking in particular of tenements, but this concern for family life would again occur in sociological investigations of flat life, in the late 1970s. The party underlined its opposition to the flat in a further section, stating that 'well-built houses of bricks and mortar are best suited to the English climate and the English way of living.'[207] This patriotic invocation was echoed in a paper presented to Clapham Labour Party in 1944, in which the speaker suggested that the 'ideal' home was a three-bedroom detached house, complete with 'rusticated brick facings, perhaps half weather tiled, with a well-made and substantial oak front door and crazy paving to the forecourt path and garage entrance.'[208] Other elements of the British left were less conservative in their tastes: the Communist Party claimed in 1944 that the supposedly high figures in favour of a house with a garden was 'a good deal of unreal nonsense.'[209] The Communists maintained that the supposed dislike of flats was based on the assumption that modern flats would be 'the barrack-like tenements with which [the working classes] are familiar.'[210]

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[204] Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, 'Kitchens as Technology and Politics: An Introduction' in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (eds.), *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users* (Cambridge MT, 2009), 1-29, 10.
[205] Ravetz, 'From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat', 130.
[206] LHA, Birmingham Labour Party, *Homes For the People*, 9.
[207] Ibid., 11.
[208] LHA, LP/362.5/318, W.E. Fox, *Housing: The True Solution* (1944), 3.
[209] LHA, CPGB, *Memorandum on Housing*, 22.
[210] Ibid.

Correspondingly, the socialist author Douglas Brown expressed a belief that modern housing was the future, asserting in a 1945 pamphlet that 'a society which does not bequeath any architectural monuments to posterity will be a dull, uncreative, unpleasant one in which to live!'[211] Across several photographic panels, Brown contrasted the filthy slum kitchen with a gleaming modern one, articulating his desire that

> the housewife must have a constant supply of hot and cold running water, a deep sink with working space on either side, stainless rails for pots and pans, a plate-rack, a working table with cupboards and doors, a well ventilated food cupboard.[212]

Charlotte Wildman has described how an emphasis on 'newness' was also a feature of civic propaganda, noting that Manchester council's 1947 film *A City Speaks* compared the decrepit slums of Hulme with the brand new bathroom, kitchen and inside toilet of houses in the Wythenshawe council estate.[213] Whilst 'newness' and modern design were given as signs of advanced socialism, there remained within many local Labour parties a desire for the cottage aesthetic of the inter-war period.

In an edition of *Labour Woman* in April 1950, an article lambasted the fact that women were still forced to use old methods on 'washing day', stating that in a recent government report on the type of domestic hot water supplied to homes, a large number of homes still relied on water heated in a kettle or pan.[214] As the article put it, this was 'just like great-grandmother in 1850!', before going on to wonder 'how many men working on farms, or in factories, are obliged to use exactly the same tools and equipment as their great-grandfathers in the same trades!'[215] The feeling that in spite of the great leap forward after 1945, living standards for many had remained relatively stagnant began to drive Labour discussion towards the need for conspicuously modern amenities. A further *Labour Woman* piece of November 1950 reported on a travelling exhibition of 'good and bad design in the home' by the Council of Industrial

[211] LHA, Brown, *An Englishman's Home*, 24.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Charlotte Wildman, 'A City Speaks: The Projection of Civic Identity in Manchester', *Twentieth Century British History*, 23:1 (2012), 80–99 at 93.
[214] LHA, *Labour Woman*, (April 1950), 54.
[215] Ibid.

Design, which had a discussion forum for housewives. The article's author noted of the exchange:

> it is evident that women have strong views on an age which has explored the secrets of atomic energy and built aeroplanes which can travel at the speed of sound, yet cannot apparently make a tomato sauce bottle which will let out the tomato sauce.[216]

The need for progress in the context of the Cold War was further enhanced by what Susan Reid has described as the confrontation between 'competing images of modernity and the good life', namely socialist and capitalist.[217]

Whilst Labour were of course aligned with the 'capitalist' side, the party did on occasion look wistfully behind the Iron Curtain. In 1953, the Labour newspaper *Forward* published an article on 'Fine Flats and Crowded Shops in Stalin Allee', reporting on the developments in East Berlin.[218] The correspondent had visited a flat on the boulevard, noting that 'it was a large, roomy comfortable flat with higher ceilings than we have in most of our municipal flats in Britain.'[219] Further to this, the correspondent was impressed by 'a good, spotlessly clean bathroom and a modern scullery and an arrangement by which rubbish disappeared down a chute.'[220] Similarly, a trade union delegate to the USSR in 1952 wrote approvingly of dinner at a dock engineer's 'comfortable and attractively furnished' flat in Odessa.[221] This focus on the wonder of modern amenities remained a steady feature of the flat's appeal – Jephcott would report in 1971 that modern flats were 'delightfully easy to run' for the housewife.[222]

There nevertheless remained in Labour ranks a slight scepticism of the modern flat. In a colour party publication commemorating the 1951 Festival of Britain, which has been described as the height of post-war celebration of progress, some reticence was evident in the display of the portrayal of the

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[216] LHA, *Labour Woman*, (November 1950), 227.
[217] Susan E. Reid, '"Our kitchen is just as good": Soviet Responses to the American Kitchen', in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (eds.), *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users* (Cambridge MT, 2009), 83-112 at 85.
[218] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Forward* (January, 1953), 8.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] LHA, British Workers' Delegation, *What we saw in Russia*, 8.
[222] Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 5.

Lansbury Estate in Poplar, which took centre stage as the architecture exhibition at the Festival.[223] Although photographs portrayed the six- and three-storey blocks of flats, the publication nonetheless assured the reader that 'there are houses in Lansbury as well, for not everyone likes flats. But houses or flats, they provide grand homes for the families who move in.'[224] This qualification was far from uncommon. In a housing debate in the House of Commons in July 1952, the Conservative MP for Wallasey and Parliamentary Secretary to the MHLG Ernest Marples described controversy over blocks of flats in Newcastle, remarking that 'some people say that [the block] is too big…and there are those who say on amenity grounds that the design is wrong.'[225] Nevertheless, in the light of the parlous state of the existing slums and the near-slum conditions of the lower end of the private rented sector, Labour began to see modern flats as an effective way to deliver higher living standards and to exponentially increase the number of dwellings built.

Throughout the 1950s, the party magazine *Labour Woman* devoted columns to modernity and affluent living abroad, which gives some sense of how international progress was drawn upon in the pursuit of modern amenities. In a July 1950 article entitled 'The Housewife in Labour Sweden', the author wrote with fascination of homes equipped with automatic lighting, refrigerators, stainless steel kitchen-fittings, built-in furniture, electric cookers and double-glazed windows.[226] Equally, the appeal of social democratic Sweden was described as a 'housewife's paradise', due to the existence of labour-saving devices freeing women from drudgery. The article went on to assert that 'the housewife's lot in this country of cleanliness is a relatively easy one; her home is built around her needs especially to save her work.'[227] This theme continued in a 1956 feature entitled 'Meet Fru Larsen of Copenhagen', which observed that Fru Larsen did not 'want life to be all house-cleaning, there must be time to live, to cultivate one's interests, to play with the children.'[228] An earlier article discussing Copenhagen in October 1952 had also been impressed by Danish

[223] Conekin, *Autobiography of a nation*, 72.
[224] LHA, Labour Party, *Festival*, 6.
[225] *Hansard*, (Commons), 503 (15 July 1952), 2106-18, accessed online 14 June 2016 at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1952/jul/15/housing-1.
[226] LHA, *Labour Woman* (July 1950), 131.
[227] Ibid.
[228] LHA, *Labour Woman* (January 1956), 41.

homeliness, noting approvingly that 'blocks of flats have tremendous windows which let in plenty of light and air, and many have balconies screened at the side so that no-one is overlooked by his neighbours.'[229]

A second piece focused on Fru Anderson of Sweden in April 1956 returned to the kitchen, with the article highlighting the standardisation of Swedish kitchens, based on a scientific survey of housewives' working conditions. As the author admired, 'nothing has been arranged at random in Fru Anderson's modern kitchen.'[230] As well as providing a recipe for Swedish meatballs, the article went on to excitedly describe that 'her sink is covered by stainless steel. Her stove is electrical. All the floors in her little flat are covered by easily cleaned linoleum. She has a rubbish chute and vacuum cleaner, and the opportunity of using a wonderfully equipped laundry.'[231] It might be considered that the communal laundry was one modern element actually *losing* its dynamism: by 1957, forty per cent of all households in Britain had private washing machines.[232]

Labour Woman features outside of Scandinavia were occasionally more critical. A January 1956 piece was quite taken with Frau Schmidt's modern fourth-floor flat in Vienna, especially a tree-lined grass court below it with fountains and sculptures by female Viennese artists.[233] Despite such acclaim, estate sculptures was not always well-received when transferred to Britain. A May 1956 *Tribune* article reported how tenants of the South Kilburn estate in Willesden were 'disgusted' by nude statues on their estate. The tenants apparently claimed that 'they do not want art. They want something useful.'[234] Frau Schneider in West Germany elicited more sympathy than praise in a May 1956 *Labour Woman* article, given that her flat was just 36 square metres in size. As the article observed, this was 'not a lot of room for four persons and is not very practical to boot.'[235] Frau Schneider also had little in the way of modern amenities, being unable to afford a refrigerator.[236] Nevertheless, the

[229] LHA, *Labour Woman* (October 1952), 448.
[230] LHA, *Labour Woman* (April 1956), 53.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 66-7.
[233] LHA, *Labour Woman* (January 1956), 8.
[234] LSEA, *Tribune* (18 May 1956), 7.
[235] LHA, *Labour Woman* (May 1956), 71.
[236] Ibid.

modernity of European home life is demonstrative of the modern future Labour hoped to build: functionally crafted, technologically advanced and centred on the family home.

As recounted in Chapter Two, Labour councils across Britain had by the late 1950s began to build high-rise housing in large volumes. The LCC had made a 'clear union' between Brutalist architecture and concrete, with their Morris Walk estate in Woolwich a triumphal example of modernism.[237] It is important to note that Labour's instruments of local government were operating within a favourable context. As detailed by Otto Saumarez Smith, 'an almost unquestioned use of a modernist idiom' in political discussion of urban design had seen the Conservatives embrace modernism by the early 1960s. [238] Although their recommendations were not adopted until 1967, the 1961 report of the Parker Morris Committee on space standards in the home was one such representation of this 'modernist idiom.'[239] Equally, as Chapter Two has detailed, subsidies did play a part in stimulating high-rise building though were not wholly responsible for *sustaining* it. Even with central government approval of modern housing, this did not stifle debate within Labour locally. In a 1962 debate within the pages of West Ham's Labour newspaper, points for and against the construction of a sixteen storey block of flats were put forward. Opposing, Councillor T.C. McMillan claimed that 'it would be out of keeping with the small houses in the area.'[240] McMillan did not appear to object to flats entirely, arguing that the construction of a single block without a surrounding 'mixed' estate of houses was 'bad planning of the type strongly condemned by the LCC town planning department.' [241] By contrast, under the heading 'Common Sense', the West Ham Housing Committee Chairman E. Kebbell proposed that 'to go up in the air is plain, down-to-earth common sense when land is scarce.'[242] Kebbell maintained that 'tall point blocks, with only four to six flats to a floor, give more privacy than the lower slab blocks, where access to a flat is gained by passing other people's doors.'[243] Although a lack of privacy

[237] Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory*, 212 and 217.
[238] Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment', 220.
[239] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 14-16.
[240] LHA, LP/GS/8, *West Ham South Citizen* (September 1962).
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.

has been cited as a detrimental feature of high-rise, Jephcott suggested in her 1971 study that most residents believed the high flat offered increased privacy.[244]

As emphasised throughout this thesis, the physically poor state of much of urban Britain had by the early 1960s converted many sceptics to the flat, with flats 'represented as the *sine qua non* of rapid slum clearance' by the once-suspicious Birmingham Labour Party.[245] Labour's re-entry into government in October 1964 drove this impulse still further. A memorandum by the Labour Party Research Department on the 'Quality of Living' from March that year encapsulated Labour's modern aims in full, stating that 'it is only lack of planning which has made tall towns a practical impossibility, and there is no reason why we should not be able to enjoy the spice of intensely urban living.'[246] The memorandum went on to state that 'much of our resistance to living in tall buildings comes from outdated habits, and the fact we have neglected urban services and amenities that should have been provided long ago.'[247] Though strident, the 'high water mark of confidence' in a complete programme of modernity may have already passed by the mid-1960s, and the conservationist bent of the 1963 policy publication *Labour's Plan for Old Houses* might have pointed to this.[248] In spite of this, the 'tall towns' that the research department spoke of were becoming a reality in many British cities, from the 'dazzling vision of Worstedopolis' envisaged by Bradford's city planners, to the 'British Brasilia' of Newcastle.[249]

A creeping reassessment of Modern flats began to take place throughout the 1960s, as more and more were built. One issue that even those in favour of the Modern flat had identified were the potential issues of flats for families with young children. Jephcott would observe on Glasgow estates in 1971 that high flats were near-universally thought to be 'nae use for the bairns', or a poor choice for young children.[250] The demographic profile of new housing estates,

[244] Phil Jones, 'The Rise and Fall of the Multi-Storey Ideal: Public Sector High-Rise Housing in Britain 1945-2002, with special reference to Birmingham' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham (2003), 248; Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 5.
[245] Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham*, 432.
[246] LHA, LPRD, *The Quality of Living*, 3.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment', 243.
[249] Gunn, 'Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism', 850.
[250] Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 49.

usually principally composed of young families, made this an especially pressing point. A *Labour Woman* article of 1961 by the MP for East Flint, Eirene White, looked at a new survey, *Two to Five in High Flats*, on play spaces in high-rise developments.[251] White had sat on a committee investigating the matter, which also included the former editor of *Labour Woman* Mary Sutherland and Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative MP for Finchley. The survey, sponsored by Joan Maizels and financed by the Joseph Rowntree Trust, had covered eighty tower blocks across eighteen LCC or borough council estates and found that only three estate had play areas for small children, with half having no enclosed space at all.[252] *Two to Five in High Flats* found that two-thirds of mothers living above the fifth floor worried about the safety of young children, to the extent that toddlers were rarely let out to play. Comments such as 'balcony worries me to death – I don't let them out of my sight' characterised the study.[253] White concluded her *Labour Woman* piece by remarking that the 'contrast with Stockholm and Copenhagen, where they have had high flats with proper playgrounds and play-leaders for years, is disturbing, to say the least.'[254] The points raised by the study found further expression in 1965, when *Labour Woman* reported on the attempt by the National Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations to have better play spaces built into high flat developments.[255] A deputation met the representative of the MHLG, James MacColl, and made it clear that they were committed to obtaining a 'firm promise at that all new high-storey flats should include, as part of the building, space for the provision of some desirable form of social amenity.'[256] On the basis of Jephcott's later work, it would seem these promises were either not made or not kept, as she found that play spaces were sparse, with most young children limited to playing within the flat.[257] Interestingly, Jephcott suggested that the deck access 'streets in the sky' of Park Hill in Sheffield was considered a 'socially successful' example of a modern flat development.

[251] LHA, *Labour Woman* (July 1961), 10.
[252] Ibid.
[253] LSE Archives, Women's Library, Joan Maizels, *Two to Five in High Flats: An Enquiry into Play Provision for Children aged two to five years living in High Flats* (1961), 11.
[254] LHA, *Labour Woman*, (July 1961), 10.
[255] LHA, *Labour Woman*, (September 1965), 145.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 94.

Hollow has noted that Park Hill tenants would later be believed 'incapable of grasping the benefits that planners sought to provide them with.'[258]

The perceived issues of the modern flat were fully exposed in a 1970 *Socialist Commentary* piece entitled 'The Motor–road to Wigan Pier.'[259] Retracing Orwell's steps, the author claimed that 'the mean little streets' of Orwell's 1930s experience still existed, though they were to be pulled down, which he wryly observed would 'most likely anger the *Shelter* people.'[260] The author focused his fire on 'those grey concrete horrors, either tower blocks or the newer four-storey estates,' claiming that they were little more than 'prison architecture.'[261] Coming just two years after the 1968 collapse of the Ronan Point block in Newham, this Labour attack on high flats would seem a reasonable point at which to suggest a Labour appetite for unambiguous modernity had ceased. Though Ronan Point, crucially, represented the end of the dominance of the high flat rather than modern developments altogether, as the 1970s would see extensive construction of lower-rise estates, the reaction against slum clearance examined in the previous chapter had made modernism seem far less attractive to those within Labour.

Labour's 1970 manifesto, *Now Britain's strong let's make it great to live in*, implied a job as yet unfinished. It was strongly assertive of the need to build still further, claiming that Britain was been divided between the luxuries of the suburbs and the deprivation of the inner city.[262] Yet architectural modernism had begun to run out of steam: Dunleavy regarded the decline of the high flat as emphatic of the 'aging and partial decay of the interwar architectural culture.'[263] It is difficult to argue against the notion that modernism had peaked by the latter half of the 1960s, though Burnett's claim that the flat was an 'incident' is rather more questionable.[264] His assertion that 'the individual house in a garden has survived as the ideal of the majority of English people' may have some truth to it, but the fact that the built elements of his 'incident' are still lived in by large

[258] Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 8; Matthew Hollow, 'Governmentality on the Park Hill estate', 130.
[259] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (November 1970), 22.
[260] Ibid., 22-3.
[261] Ibid.
[262] LHA, Labour Party, *Now Britain's strong*, 15.
[263] Dunleavy, *Politics of Mass Housing*, 59.
[264] Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 313.

numbers of people would make it something considerably more than that.[265] The rise of modern housing was driven by political ideas that were far more sincere than might previously have been imagined. Labour were serious in their desire to deliver 'modern amenities' and striking examples of the future to all. The contested aesthetic associations of modern council housing, supposedly evocative of 'Victorian rookeries' in some readings, should not blind scholars to the *aims* of the modernist project.[266] Modern housing was seen as the integrated solution to the poor housing conditions and seemingly anachronistic model of living that Labour perceived throughout the post-war period. Whilst it is undoubted that the modernist zeal reshaped urban Britain to an extent that was unnecessary, it is worth noting Jephcott's findings in Glasgow that the 'brightness, airiness and modernity' of high-rise flats were highly prized by their tenants.[267]

The initially positive reception of modern housing was not simply a socialist conceit. As the *Labour Woman* discussions of modern life across Europe would indicate, linoleum floored, spacious modern dwellings with electric lighting were an exciting prospect in the years after the Second World War. Where problems arose it was less the fact of modern housing, and more to do with a lack of consultation and continued social problems, as well as too much of an assumption that tenants would be as beguiled by the architectural wonder of modern developments as some within Labour were. Shapely has considered that local councils worked on the assumption that 'tenants would learn to appreciate their new environment.' This would appear a reasonable judgement, especially given the approaches to tenant selection and understandings of community formation detailed in the previous sections of this chapter. Most significantly, the end of modernism without did not mean the end of modernism within – Samuel has described how a turn to conservation of 'period' dwellings in the early 1970s was actually 'modernization in disguise, a continuation and extension of the 1950s ideals of open plan living, rather than a reversal of them.'[268] Modernism was undoubtedly part of an architectural,

[265] Ibid.
[266] Rodger, 'Slums and Suburbs', 263.
[267] Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 50.
[268] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 75.

political and cultural ‘moment’ in history – but a ‘moment’ that is still present in the built landscape of contemporary Britain.

Conclusion

The debates within Labour on the ‘modern home’ of this chapter are an exemplar of the intricate character of twentieth-century urban transformation. Far from being simply a question of ministerial discussions and houses built accordingly, modern housing had an extensive political and cultural hinterland, most substantially within the Labour Party. Whilst the Conservatives did eventually accede to architectural modernism, if in a short-lived fashion, Labour approached modernity with significantly more enthusiasm. Considerations of class and community in addition to the more familiar subject of design contributed to the overall conception of the modern home in Labour visions. Simply put, Labour’s new urban environment would be a ‘model to the world.’[269] Whilst within the party, there were disagreements on whether the high block or the Bevan house was the best way of achieving this, the basic sentiment remained less controversial. Labour’s approach to the creation of the ‘modern home’ reflected party plans for the housing market and the wider city. It was a grand, transformative programme with far-reaching effects on society – a discrete ‘British road to socialism’.

Class was of pivotal concern in how Labour conceived of modern homes. This chapter has discussed how Labour struggled to determine whether, as a possible ‘social service’, council housing should be entirely universal or for the working classes. Then, in the context of rising living standards and apparent affluence, whether even the working classes were suited to the council home. As has been suggested, working-class prosperity was not as common an experience as Labourites and most commentators of the time convinced themselves of, and where it did occur, richer workers did not *necessarily* vote Conservative. In his study of Dagenham, Willmott conceded that even his informants *believed* that refrigerators and washing machines were owned in

[269] LHA, Labour Party, *Festival*, 7.

greater numbers than they actually were.[270] Goldthorpe's findings in Luton were in part motivated by a desire to rebut 'revisionist fallacies' of working-class *embourgeoisement*, accepted by Gaitskell and to a large extent by Wilson.[271] The 'revisionist fallacies' were far-reaching and shaped Labour policy, not least in the neglect of the poverty still in existence, particularly of those who did not fit the nuclear working-class family unit. Equally, those who were not white were not easily conceived by Labour as part of the council housing constituency until late into the period. The problem was fundamentally with who Labour imagined the working classes to be – with their appeal principally pitched at a male breadwinner – which would also determine approaches to design and community in the provision of housing. In this regard, Ravetz's observation that 'there was no concerted working-class voice to provide an evaluation of council housing' is pertinent.[272] At any rate, many if not most local Labour parties, such as the ones Sue Goss described in Southwark, were parochial in character and believed themselves to be the authentic voice of the working classes.[273] However, this 'Octavia Hill' tendency to see the beneficiaries of council housing as passive recipients had an important role in recreating the modern council home as precisely what Labour did not want it to be – a tenure for the deserving poor. As slum clearance increased, and council housing became a form of housing primarily extended to 'slum' tenants, ambiguous as the label became, 'residualisation' of council estates became a reality. Class, therefore, was as much a part of the modern home as the materials that built it.

Hoggart claimed that for the working classes, life 'centres on the groups of known streets.'[274] This assertion of a community life closely regulated by place became a point of conflict between Labour and the social sciences. Whilst the suburb was seen as something to be avoided by the late 1950s, opinion differed on how best to provide community. Should communities be preserved 'as they were', or at least as Young and Willmott and others thought they were? Or could community could be formed in inspiring modern developments, as Labour actors believed? For Labour, the overall transformation of the urban environment offered the opportunity for the creation

[270] Willmott, *Evolution of a Community*, 97.
[271] Lawrence, 'Class, Affluence and the study of everyday life', 288.
[272] Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*, 157.
[273] Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, 80.
[274] Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 63.

of new, ideal communities with modern council homes in the van of these efforts. However, the perspective of Young in particular began to influence revisionist views on how community might be formed or maintained, based as it was on a romanticised, Hoggartian vision of the working classes. Even so, Labour would not convert to preservation over redevelopment until 1968, and many Labour councils long after that. Sociologists increasingly cleaved to a nostalgic view of 'traditional' working-class community, and the Labour movement's own sentimental habits meant that they were acquiescent in this powerful narrative.

The problem was the same that Kuper had identified – community was much too blurry an abstraction to be the focus of efforts to provide homes. In an interview with the former Director of Housing in Newham, Barry Simons, he warned against idealising the 'known streets', pointing to his memories of his great aunt's original home in a Whitechapel tenement block in the 1940s. She had only two rooms for four children, shared a toilet with six other families and as Simons put it 'she knew her neighbours...and she detested them! They all lived on top of each other...'[275] Where Labour faltered was in the assumption that it could recreate a series of relationships that were specific to place, but *not* for the reasons that Labour and investigators from the social sciences believed. As Stacey observed in Banbury, the terrace 'encourages close social relations with the neighbours but makes it difficult for them to withdraw from one another.'[276] There were certainly some solidaristic ties in the life of the street, but the flaw in Labour thinking was to believe that privacy was anathema to socialism.

It is perhaps fitting to summarise Labour thinking on the modern home with an epilogue to modern housing. Urban modernism has come to be described by prominent historians such as Kenneth Morgan as consisting of 'impersonal tower blocks, often badly designed ghettos of violence and fear.'[277] Though self-evidently hyperbolic, Morgan's view of modern housing as little more than a concrete mistake has reinforced a 'common sense' that modernity was pointless and even malicious. Following his election victory in 1997, it is

[275] Interview with Barry Simons, central London (17 June 2014).
[276] Stacey, *Tradition and Change*, 108.
[277] Morgan, *People's Peace*, 194.

significant that Tony Blair chose to speak in his first major speech outside Parliament on urban deprivation in the 'no-hope' Aylesbury estate in south London. Was this 'common sense' as much a cultural judgement as a political one? In a 2013, the former West Ham councillor Keith Hasler claimed that in the early 1960s:

> There were older members of the council…who probably didn't buy into it...thought it'd be nice if we could build enough brick houses with gardens and weren't totally convinced of the dream that you could make a high-rise area a good place to live.[278]

The implication of this view is that high-rise, and perhaps modernist estates as a whole, could not be pleasant living environments simply because of what they were. As this chapter has demonstrated, Labour believed near-exactly the opposite in the 1950s and 1960s: the monumental architecture and modern amenities of brand new council flats would create ideal, socialist spaces that most had been denied before then. Equally, the seeming inability of the party to consult the people for whom they would be built, and clumsy manner in which some councils would construct utopia should not be understated. In essence, the reaction against modernism, which encompassed a cultural sense that the aesthetic had run its course and a political belief that large-scale urban redevelopment was no longer an effective means of solving urban deprivation, has translated into a unifying logic that the state of the Aylesbury estate in 1997 was inevitable. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, more attention should be paid to the political currents driving modernism: the modern home was an attempt to decisively reshape urban Britain into an unmistakeably different form.

[278] Interview with Keith Hasler, East Ham (16 June 2014).

Chapter Four: Living in the Past

History, Modernity and Labour Urban Policy

Introduction

At the core of Labour urban policy was a desire to build a consciously modern Britain; to create a utopian future from the inadequacies of the built past. This was not a modern project simply defined by architectural limits – it was to some extent a state of mind. As Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius have suggested, '"Modern" meant something rational, logical, pure, universal', and in the context of housing and urban redevelopment, it was as much signified by the *rhetoric* of progress as it was by the Barbican Estate.[1] Labour adherents certainly believed themselves to be in the promethean vanguard of giving progress to the people, but a core question of this thesis is why, in spite of radical pretensions, Labour policy in the period 1945-70 did not always appear to keep pace with social change. The answer may be found in both the interpretation and understanding of history by Labour as an organisation, as well as in the very nature of modernity as a concept – which by 1964 had been utilised as a social and political narrative of change for at least the past half century. Labour's assessment of its own history was an exercise in Whiggishness, with the objective of progress creeping a little closer with each achievement. Clare Griffiths has astutely described this as 'the implication that Labour would always move with the times: that it could not be defined by timeless commitments, but by the contingencies of social and economic realities.'[2] The manner in which Labour operated as an organisation, and whether its sense of history had implications for urban policy, may be especially revealing of how and why party rhetoric did not always meet expectations. At times, for all Labour's modern rhetoric and zeal for a utopian urban future, the party appeared to be most comfortable living in the past. It is in understanding the competition and co-existence of history and modernity in the creation of

[1] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 9-10.
[2] Clare V.J. Griffiths, 'History and the Labour Party' in Clare V.J. Griffiths, James J. Nott and William Whyte (eds.), *Classes, Cultures and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford, 2011), 282-301 at 287.

urban policy that Labour's vision and actions in transforming urban Britain can be explained in full.

A 1961 article commenting on the state of Labour politics in the East End of London took particular aim at an 'all-pervading parochialism', which the author asserted governed the thinking of the unnamed party in question.[3] According to the author, party policy was interpreted in a manner that privileged long-held local objectives, such as ensuring that local supporters had council housing. In effect, the obligations of the past determined the outcomes of the present. Jon Lawrence has noted that whilst parties might change over time, 'party activists have displayed a powerful need to believe in continuity – seeking to place themselves within an unfolding, seamless history of political commitment.'[4] The local structure of Labour created a 'common heritage' of what it meant to be Labour, and as the 1961 examination of the East End would suggest, this could lead to the ossification of local parties. Indeed, Griffiths has observed that the 'passing down' of this common heritage could serve as a form of control, through the creation of 'a united purpose which newer recruits were in no position to interrogate on the basis of their own experience.'[5] Even the supposedly iconoclastic revisionists engaged with history in their attempts to re-make Labour – Black remarks that they 'made their case with due respect to tradition.'[6] Richard Jobson has argued that a 'nostalgic attachment to the past' was a key determinant of Labour attitudes, particularly over issues such as the proposed replacement of Clause IV from 1959-60.[7] Whilst Jobson posits that 'nostalgia' (a state of reflecting upon an idealised past) is useful for considering emotionally charged disputes over party character such as Clause IV, the fact that the past in question is *idealised* may mean nostalgia is not always the most effective framework for understanding the role of history in Labour's creation of policy. The past, recent or otherwise, was not always referred to uncritically by those within Labour when they considered it. An example for this rather more nuanced concern for the past was evident in Labour's interpretation of the 1930s, viewed bitterly by socialists as a decade of hunger, want and government inaction on housing. Labour acted to present their plans for Britain

[3] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1961), 13.
[4] Jon Lawrence, 'Labour – the myths it has lived by' in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), 341-366 at 341-342.
[5] Griffiths, 'History and the Labour Party', 291.
[6] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 135.
[7] Jobson, 'Waving the Banners of a Bygone Age', 139.

as what the 1930s *ought* to have been. Jeremy Nuttall has argued that this owed something to Labour's convoluted sense of time: socialism was seen as something both 'relatively achievable', but also 'very long term.'[8] In essence, Labour utilisation of history was attached to the party belief that it was marching toward the New Jerusalem. Although there was clearly a need in policy terms to refer back to the 1945-51 government as the party's most recent experience of high office, Labour's interpretation of it through 1951-64 varied from near-veneration to disappointment as a 'lost moment' where the party could and should have achieved more. Where these strands of history met policy becomes apparent in plans for urban transformation, whether in the disgust at 'Victorian' squalor or in the belief that housing should be a 'social service'.

How did Labour comprehend modernity? As discussed throughout this thesis, Labour rhetoric asserted that 'the modern', in the form of grand civic plans, soaring architecture and better communities, symbolised ceaseless social progress. It is important to separate the theoretical sense of modernity generally discussed in academic discourse from the more 'colloquial' feeling of modernity used here. In Labour terms, modernity had abstract properties, but was connected more closely with discernible visions of the future and an ideal society. For Labour, 'modern' took on a distinct form – the process by which Britain would become a modern nation in architectural, mental and social terms was part of a journey toward *socialism*. As a 1948 edition of *Talking Points* proclaimed, 'Labour has set out to build a new Britain, socially, economically, and with bricks and mortar too.'[9] This would, at least rhetorically, culminate in the 'White Heat' of Harold Wilson's famous vision of scientific socialism, before the historicist turn of the late 1960s 'destroyed the very essence of the socialist vision' – that of perpetual improvement.[10] As has been suggested, perhaps the most quixotic aspect of modernity was that it could be historicised. Even if, as Bernhard Rieger and Martin Daunton have claimed, modernity was a 'means of examining the results of historical change' which could shift from era to era, it is striking that the idea of constant (and mostly positive) development was an aged one even by the Festival of Britain in 1951.[11] Becky Conekin's revelation that the Festival was inspired by the modernist, social democratic spectacle of

[8] Nuttall, 'Pluralism, the people and time', 731.
[9] LHA, *Talking Points* (18 September 1948), 8.
[10] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 163.
[11] Daunton and Rieger, 'Introduction', 7.

the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition is a sobering reminder that even the most novel representations of modern destiny had some stake in the past.[12] This is not to say that it might somehow have been possible to construct a radical ideal bereft of links to some preceding era, but more that the form of modernity that Labour utilised and modified appeared at points to be situated in earlier decades. In this regard, Robert Eccleshall's observation that 'Labour modernity' was marked by 'the reinvigoration, not the destruction, of an *ancien regime*' seems apt.[13] As the post-war years went on, this once-revolutionary set of principles began to seem archaic. Labour struggled to adapt effectively to a Britain in which a consciously modern urban environment was found wanting.

The Forward March of Labour: The influence of history on Labour urban policy

Despite being the youngest of the three main parliamentary parties of the mid-twentieth century, the Labour Party paid exceptional attention to history. A 1954 piece for *Labour's Northern Voice* opposing the Housing Act of that year encapsulates this socialist regard for days of yore, with the author of the piece suggesting that 'sometimes men are too near a thing to see its real importance', before going on to consider that such luminaries as the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Glasgow rent strikers of 1915 had no idea that they were making history.[14] This regard for history was a means of defining what Labour was and what it stood for in the present. In his study of local constituency parties, Tom Forester noted that very few party members had a 'reasonable political knowledge of the Labour Party' throughout most of the post-war period.[15] In effect, for the most part, party members relied on a broad notion of what Labour policy was at any one time – and as Griffiths has observed, this enabled a sustained mythology about Labour's political commitments.[16] Significantly, Henry Drucker claimed that Labour 'is a party which exists, as a result of certain remembered past actions, to do a particular job now and in the future.'[17] Labour's 'particular job', in terms of housing, was to sweep away the Victorian city and to create a

[12] Conekin, *Autobiography of a nation*, 47.
[13] Eccleshall, 'Party Ideology and National Decline', 162-3.
[14] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (December 1954), 8.
[15] Forester, *Labour Party and the Working Class*, 84.
[16] Griffiths, 'History and the Labour Party', 296.
[17] Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, 25.

utopian, modern urban environment. The presence, perceived or otherwise, of negative aspects of the past and belief in Labour's mission was of key importance – as Dennis Hardy has asserted, 'the stimulus to create utopia is sharpened by the perceived unacceptability of what is seeking to replace.'[18] The seeming need of Labour to define its mission against the bad old days of Victorian industrialism and the missed opportunities of the 1930s – and from the 1950s to refer to the attempt between 1945-51 to carry out its mission – represented a 'history' that was curiously entangled with modernity.

In late 1945, the Birmingham Labour weekly *Town Crier* published a piece on the future direction of housing by Councillor Albert Bradbeer. The councillor, who would later go on to dominate municipal politics in 1950s Birmingham, took the opportunity to define Labour against the shadows of the past, claiming that their defeated Unionist (Conservative) opponents consisted 'of men and women whose ideas date back to the reign of Queen Victoria.'[19] Bradbeer's attack on his recently defeated opponents was emphatic of the dual target that the Conservatives (and on occasion the Liberals) presented to Labour: both represented the iniquities of the Industrial Revolution, as well as the purported failures of the National Government in the 1930s. Of the two, the latter was be pursued with greater vigour. In one 1948 housing pamphlet, the question posed of why there was a housing problem was answered with reference to the National Government: Labour insisted that they had done little about *existing* poor housing, despite building record amounts of *new* housing.[20] As has been discussed in preceding chapters, Labour felt that the Tories had allowed the 1930s to become a 'dismal decade' and were influenced by the generally poor experience of their strongholds in areas such as the north-east of England and south Wales. Though by no means a Labourite, but certainly evocative of this strain of thought, the Anarchist writer George Woodcock wrote in 1944 of inter-war housing that despite 'steady improvement in the mechanical factors of man's environment, the houses in which he lived were little better in most respects and worse in others than those which his ancestors built.'[21] Further to this, not all images of thirties despair could be attributed to an unduly gloomy leftist outlook. Discussing the municipalisation of slum housing in

[18] Hardy, *Utopian England*, 56.
[19] LHA, LP/GS/8, *Town Crier* (27 October 1945), 2.
[20] LHA, Labour Party, *Guide to Post-War Housing Policy*, 5.
[21] LHA, Woodcock, *Homes or Hovels*, 7.

Birmingham in 1953, Councillor J.S. Meadows gave a vivid description of his slum upbringing, noting that it was a 'small back-to-back house in a block of ten with one room down and two small bathrooms.'[22] He went on to remark that their 'garden' was a stone yard overlooked by all the houses, water was drawn by a standpipe and all the houses were gas lit until electricity was installed 'at the tenants' expense.'[23] Labour's housing 'mission' was a reaction to such legacies of the nineteenth century, as well as to 1930s policy failures. Indeed, Meadows' conclusion that the central redevelopment schemes in Birmingham would be 'a living monument to Labour' is a succinct illustration of the reaction and incorporation of history in housing policy. Through policies such as municipalisation and accompanying redevelopment schemes, Labour were both sweeping away the past and bringing justice to the people.

Throughout the years 1945-70, housing in line for slum clearance was characterised by Labour as an unfortunate legacy of either the Industrial Revolution or the inter-war period. In his 1945 housing pamphlet, the socialist author Douglas Brown illustrated his argument with a range of photographs of slum areas, stating that 'if you look at them carefully, they will be sufficient to convince you that the dark places of the cities must be swept away.'[24] Similarly, the Co-operative Party declared in 1959 that despite the social reforms of the late nineteenth century, 'housing escaped the attentions, not only of the emergent Inspectors, but of the municipal empire-builders of the day.'[25] This focus on the 'dark places' did not entirely preclude some assessment of Labour's pre-1945 approach to housing. Whilst Labour-voting areas had suffered tremendously during the Great Depression and its aftermath, there was acknowledgment in some quarters that Labour had a tendency to fixate upon housing misery. Martin Francis has suggested that Crosland's thinking was developed in part by his recognition of the affluence experienced by some of England in the 1930s and 1940s, noting of *The Future of Socialism* 'far from being a child of the [1950s] age of affluence, many of its key themes had first seen the light of day in an earlier age of affluence.'[26] In this regard, Crosland was especially perturbed by the seeming inability of some sections of Labour to

[22] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (June 1953), 3.
[23] Ibid.
[24] LHA, Brown, *An Englishman's Home*, 3.
[25] LHA, Co-operative Party, *Housing*, 3.
[26] Francis, 'Mr Gaitskell's Ganymede', 61.

take account of affluence in the early 1950s. He outlined his thoughts on this in *The Future of Socialism*, writing that:

> conservative or indolent-minded people on the Left, finding the contemporary scene too puzzling and unable to mould it into the old familiar categories, are inclined to seek refuge in the slogans and ideas of 50 years ago.[27]

Crosland certainly did not deny the miserable housing conditions that still existed in the 1950s, nor the nineteenth-century connotations of it – in his 1962 publication *The Conservative Enemy*, he would go so far as to state that 'much of built-up Britain is little better than a Victorian slum, a drab and oppressive legacy of the first Industrial Revolution.'[28] Where he differed from received Labour wisdom was in his conviction that revulsion to a filthy tenement could not be enough: a critical view of policy and practice was also a necessity. Arthur Marsh sounded a similar note in a 1954 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, claiming that inter-war policy on both sides had been 'chaotic', describing the 'doctrinaire alternation' of policy between owner-occupation by the Conservatives, and council housing by Labour at a local level.[29] There grew a sense amongst the revisionist right that Labour had to try to transcend obvious patterns of behaviour. As he digested the 1955 election defeat, Hugh Gaitskell noted a letter to him from a member of the Labour League of Youth, who claimed that most young people see mass-unemployment as 'being in the same category as the Dodo.' The young man in question went on to state that despite coming from a 'slum' area, neither he nor his friends '…have ever known what it is to be really hungry, to go without food or to have "the fear of the sack."'[30] Gaitskell would not be leader until later that year, but he set out a broader revisionist stall in his piece. In particular, his consideration that Labour ought to 'avoid confusion between means and ends' applied to housing as well as to then-prevalent left-wing calls to nationalise the chemical industry.[31] The

[27] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 96.
[28] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 190.
[29] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (January 1954), 8.
[30] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (July 1955), 205.
[31] Ibid.

perception of a dark urban history could be used to shape Labour policy, but it could also confound it.

An even more complex Labour relationship to the past emerged following the party's period in office from 1945-51. During Labour's time in government, the party had attempted to transform the urban environment away from what they saw as Victorian chaos, towards a socialist ideal. In the party magazine produced for the 1951 Festival of Britain, Labour claimed that the new Lansbury Estate in Poplar was nothing less than 'a new society which will be true to the vision of George Lansbury and the other Socialist pioneers.'[32] However, with the retreat to opposition after defeat in the general election of October 1951, Labour members began to see the 1945-51 period as a job unfinished – a great project still in need of completion. This was not made any better by the fact, as Lawrence noted, that 'most accounts of Labour's great breakthrough were written *after* the party had lost office in 1951.'[33] One 1959 piece by the principal of Ruskin College, H.D. Hughes, expressed this attitude of paradise missed, claiming that 1945 was the first five year plan in a twenty-five year transition to true socialism, or as he put it, 'the path was long, but clearly signposted.'[34] It would probably not be ungenerous to say that Hughes was an example of the 'conservative socialist' that Crosland had railed against in his 1956 *tour de force*. Nevertheless, this view was far from uncommon. Keith Hasler, a former councillor in 1960s Newham, recollected that East Ham's programme of building 'would probably have satisfied Nye Bevan's criteria that a council house be every bit as good as a private house.'[35] The achievements of 'Nye' had unquestionably set the standard for Labour achievements in housing, at least in the popular culture of the party. In a further article on housing policy in 1954, Marsh had struck a different tone, describing housing in the Attlee government as little better than 'hand-to-mouth policy.'[36] He warned that part of the problem was that housing could never be a 'here-and-now' kind of policy programme, as most improvement would always lie in the future.[37] If Marsh was to be believed, this created an electoral issue for Labour conceptions of housing –

[32] LHA, Labour Party, *Festival*, 7. The estate is now almost entirely surrounded by a rather different 'new society', that of the Docklands development.
[33] Lawrence, 'Labour – the myths it has lived by', 360.
[34] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (October 1959), 11.
[35] Interview with Keith Hasler, East Ham (16 June 2014).
[36] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (February 1954), 50.
[37] Ibid., 51.

improvement was a future promise, rather than something instantaneous. Conversely, local parties may have believed that housing improvement ought to be something considerably more immediate. Recalling West Ham's housing programme, which he had assisted with as borough architect from 1961 (and Chief Architect from 1963), Ken Lund suggested that the aim was 'giving the areas what they should be.'[38] Labour's impatience to do what they could at the local level, given the absence of governmental power, may have meant that 'improvement' was something delivered sooner than it realistically could be.

The local dimension to party interpretations of Labour history was of some importance in the context of housing. Sluggish political cultures, like that of London's East End tended to develop in 'safe' Labour areas where party rule was rarely contested, though indolence could also be found in more marginal areas such as Birmingham and Bristol. Roy Hattersley remembered that when he was elected to Sheffield City Council in the late 1950s, an 'old guard' of 1920s councillors were still dominant.[39] Correspondingly, Stephen Timms noted that when he was first elected in 1984, Newham was run by a 'staid old establishment', with the leader of the council 'a man named Jack Hart, who was first elected in 1939…and well into his seventies.'[40] The fact that many post-war Labour councils were dominated by people who had learnt their craft in the 1920s or 1930s may have had an effect on the local interpretation of policy, as did the aforementioned 'common heritage' of the local parties. G.D.H. Cole listed the ages of those in the first two Labour cabinets in 1945 and 1947, in his 1948 history of the party. Most senior politicians were well over fifty, and only three below that age, with Aneurin Bevan and Harold Wilson included in that number.[41] This dominance of venerable figures could have created a 'policy lag' – in which the solutions of ten or twenty years before were presented by Labour councillors as the obvious course of action. In addition, a narrow local base could ensure that a monotonous view of the party 'mission' was promulgated. A 1970 *Socialist Commentary* piece examining four city Labour parties found that Birmingham may have had as few as 8,000 members and struggled to get volunteers out. Further to this, the author of the article

[38] Interview with Ken Lund, Telephone (26 March 2014).
[39] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[40] Interview with Stephen Timms MP, Portcullis House, Westminster (24 July 2014). As noted in Chapter Two, Hart was in fact first elected even earlier, in 1935!
[41] G.D.H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), 428.

remarked that Glasgow had little political culture, and in terms of housing policy, 'the intentions are good but the results are grim.'[42] Black has observed that throughout most of the 1950s, the 'exiguity of the activist layer' of branches was near-ubiquitous.[43] In the case of Birmingham, authoritarian control by the council leader Frank Price and his successor Harry Watton – the latter referred to as 'little Caesar' and 'the Fuhrer' – ensured that wider policy debate was limited.[44] Hattersley remembered Price and Watton from his time as MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook, suggesting of Price that 'he didn't have an ideological bone in his body. He was Labour because it was what he was, it was what he was born into.'[45] Of Watton, Hattersley remarked that he was 'old-fashioned Labour', asserting that 'old-fashioned Labour regarded a debate about ideas as a waste of time; "It's obvious what we need!"'[46] This single-minded devotion to the Labour 'mission' could be said to have been where history intersected with housing policy.

An unsavoury effect of longstanding, powerful party figures could include corruption – as has been previously noted, Dunleavy's interpretation of the high-rise boom was that it was facilitated by the corruption of local party 'bosses'. Whilst several historians, notably Brian Finnimore, have tended to suggest that corruption cannot be treated as an uncomplicated explanation for the more striking elements of post-war Labour housing policy, this aspect of local political culture played a part.[47] Returning to the 1961 exposé of East London, the piece found that parties were often family-run with a 'Tammany Hall' character of political patronage in the boroughs, noting that the local council 'rubber-stamps in public the committee decisions which have been made in private.'[48] The former Director of Housing in Newham some twenty years later, Barry Simons, asserted that this was the case, claiming that council decisions had been made by the leadership of the 1960s in the West Ham Supporters Club, during

[42] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (October 1970), 11-12.
[43] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 45.
[44] Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham*, 104; Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 247.
[45] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).
[46] Ibid.
[47] In addition to Finnimore, Miles Glendinning, Stefan Muthesius and Phil Jones also claim that whilst having truth to it, Dunleavy's contention is too simplistic. All argue that it obfuscates the interests of a variety of parties in building modern housing.
[48] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (March 1961), 14. Tammany Hall referred to the grossly corrupt Democratic political machine in nineteenth-century New York City. Similarly, Sue Goss believed that the sixty Labour councillors of Southwark 'probably constituted a significant proportion of the active membership': Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, 46.

'evening booze ups.' As Simons put it, 'decisions were being made outside of the structures of the councils...were related back to the structures of the council, but nevertheless made outside of it.'[49] This centralisation of power in personal networks within Newham supposedly went as far as the contacts between councillors, the building industry and architects being cemented through freemasonry, with a purported 'Newham Council Lodge' in existence.[50]

The former Bristol Labour councillor John Maclaren recollected that when Labour councils gathered in Transport House in 1974 to be lectured by Tony Crosland – 'we had to start saving money and stop being profligate' – he was surprised to see a number of 'civic Daimlers' present, having driven up in his own car.[51] Maclaren claimed that 'some of these Labour leaders from places that had been solid Labour all the time, thought it was a day out and put it on the rates!'[52] Perhaps most famously, the advocate of the 'British Brasilia' in Newcastle, T. Dan Smith was tried and sentenced to prison for corruption in the early 1970s.[53] Although Harry Watton escaped investigation, the chief architect of Birmingham Alan Maudsley was convicted in 1975 for the corrupt offering of contracts to the building firm Bryants, with little doubt left that Birmingham Labour councillors had been closely involved.[54] The existence of corruption certainly presents a complex picture in assessing post-war housing policy across Britain. This being said, whilst corruption was undoubtedly a serious issue within local Labour parties throughout the period, it would be crude to suggest that ideology played no part in the determination of policy. The likelihood is that whilst more than a few councillors behaved unethically, this did not by necessity mean that they abandoned their political beliefs – it was possible to be both a socialist, and a crook.

Writing in 1955, the frontbench MP for Fulham Michael Stewart suggested that there was an assumption that the present generation were aware of the socialist tenets of Labour, but that it had not been explained to them. He therefore recommended 'the drafting and publication of some primers of socialist belief.'[55] Stewart's article was emblematic of the belief of Labour

[49] Interview with Barry Simons, central London (17 June 2014).
[50] Ibid.
[51] Interview with John Maclaren, City Hall, Bristol (6 May 2014).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Gyford, *Politics of Local Socialism*, 7.
[54] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 248-51.
[55] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (October 1955), 302.

actors that the voting public agreed with them, due to the inability of the inter-war Conservative governments to deal with the slums. This belief was consisitent throughout the period discussed – in a party publication on housing for Labour candidates at the 1970 general election, the General Secretary claimed that 'the Tories hanker for Britain's imperial past and the "free enterprise" economy of past centuries. They scorn the values of modern-day Britain.'[56] Labour's zeal for overturning ages past and latterly, resuming the work of the 1945-51 government, was symptomatic of the party appreciation for their own interpretations of history. In safer Labour areas, as Goss described in Southwark, this strategy could be effective but it was self-evidently not elsewhere, as the 1955 general election defeat indicated.[57] Hattersley has remarked that the Sheffield Labour party was not really affected by failures in housing until the 1968 local elections, in which they lost power – and even then, that had to be balanced against a general lack of confidence in Labour nationally.[58] Labour members relied upon an optimistic assessment of historical progress, in which it was inconceivable that Labour's forward march would be halted. The creation of modern cities, reshaping of the housing market and the building of socialistically inclined communities were all seen by Labour supporters as the conditions by which the future (as represented by Labour) could decisively reject the past (as represented by the Conservatives). However, the 'spirits of the past', in the form of Labour's serene vision of an alternative reality in which they remained in power throughout the 1930s, could not help but haunt the scene. This misplaced sense of time created a 'policy lag' – as the following section will explore in more detail, 'Labour modernity' aged faster than expected. Labour's mission of modernity was strengthened by the paradox of powerful historical sensibilities.

'…feet firmly planted in the 20th century': Labour and modernity

Labour's urban policy was invigorated through the belief of members that they were participating in a major transformation of Britain. For most within Labour, their *raison d'etre* as socialists was to create in Britain a distinctively socialist

[56] LHA, LP/362.5/319, Labour Party, *Notes for Speakers: Housing* (1970), 1.
[57] Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, 47.
[58] Interview with Lord Roy Hattersley, House of Lords, Westminster (3 July 2013).

society, but the character of transformation after 1945 had an additional, important element – namely that socialism more and more became associated with the modern project. Whilst 'the modern' as socialism, is a 'reification of something that by its nature resists fixed definition', the *sense* of progress nevertheless had tremendous power in driving Labour thought in the post-war period.[59] In the course of their mission to create a socialist utopia, Labour members confronted a 'world where new technologies were transforming how and where people worked as well as where they lived and played.'[60] Though, as Black has vividly described, the 'socialist gaze' was sometimes averse to the consumer affluence that accompanied modernity, Labour were far from Luddite in their appreciation for the new, so long as it was new on their terms.[61] As suggested, 'Labour modernity' did not move as seamlessly with the times as might have been expected and the utopian vision that had been of such excitement in the 1930s and 1940s would prove to have only fleeting radical appeal in the conditions of the 1960s. The built environment, remaining present even after cultural trends had faded, signalled where 'Labour modernity' had practical effects. In the pages of a 1945 edition of *Town Crier*, Councillor Bradbeer claimed that Labour members had 'their feet firmly planted in the 20th century.'[62] Although 'Labour modernity' may have been less dynamic that the party believed, tracing the impact of this most ephemeral of radical impulses allows for a far greater understanding of why Labour aimed at such a thorough transformation of the urban environment.

Enthusiasm for the modern in the Labour party was often characterised by an effusively technocratic conception of society. In a 1948 party publication entitled *Science and Socialism*, the science journalist and socialist writer Ritchie Calder stated that 'today, we have to accept the fact that science is the pace-maker in politics.'[63] Calder went on to claim that science and socialism were 'mutually dependent and inseparable', arguing that the Labour government needed scientific ingenuity to realise utopia.[64] This had echoes of Fabian thinking in the earlier part of the twentieth century, which had anticipated an 'unambiguously modernist utopia involving science, technology, modern

[59] Powers, *Britain: modern architectures*, 8.
[60] Hardy, *Utopian England*, 15.
[61] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 2-3.
[62] LHA, *Town Crier* (27 October 1945), 2.
[63] LHA, LP/329.12, Ritchie Calder, *Science and Socialism* (1948), 3.
[64] Ibid., 5.

industrial methods and rational planning.'[65] Indeed, Calder himself would later be a fervent advocate of high-rise housing.[66] However, as has been noted throughout this thesis, newness in Labour terms could also mean something not *that* new. Alan Simmonds has asserted that new towns were 'expressions of an architectural and environmental modernity, articulated through a language of nostalgia', and other Labour urban developments could evoke earlier ideas. Even if this was the case, housing and a new urban environment were given significant weight by Labour as an expression of the advanced world they hoped to build. This point was affirmed by the Bevanite group Victory for Socialism (VFS) in a 1958 pamphlet, in which they stated 'we believe the greatness of a nation rests more soundly on the kind of homes it offers its citizens than on the number of H-bombs it possesses.'[67] Even though others within Labour were far more in favour of the H-bomb than the CND-associated VFS, the principle that Labour's future ought to be based on a well-housed population over Britain's destructive capabilities was one that would have appealed to the majority of Labour members. Housing was one arena in which for socialists, scientific expertise was considered significantly more neutral.

The most symbolic demonstration of what Labour believed to be a modern, scientific approach to housing was the 1951 Festival of Britain, with 'science as the foundation of a new modernist aesthetic.'[68] Indeed, Labour stated that new homes built on estates like the Lansbury Estate should be a 'model to the world.'[69] The 'Live Architecture Exhibition' at the Lansbury Estate did so by moving through each phase of time: it incorporated a slum area as a representation of the past, in addition to a version of the present with 'jerry-built and pokey dwellings', set against a 'glimpse of the future' in the Lansbury Estate.[70] This acutely illustrated modernism's 'polemical use of history', combined with Labour's own penchant for whiggishness.[71] Indeed, reflecting on post-war urban planning, Crosland wrote that both urban plans and the Town and Country Planning Act were intended 'to be a sure defence against the vulgarities and atrocities of the past.'[72] On the Festival, Crosland remarked that

[65] Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 137.
[66] Gyford, *Politics of Local Socialism*, 6-7.
[67] LHA, Victory for Socialism, *Roof Over Your Head*, 3.
[68] Conekin, *Autobiography of a nation*, 57-8.
[69] LHA, *Festival*, 7.
[70] Conekin, *Autobiography of a nation*, 166.
[71] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 65.
[72] Crosland, *Future of Socialism*, 358.

it had been a demonstration of the cultural enlightenment that was to accompany the Labour vision – a means of showing that the state could 'initiate…artistic endeavour of the highest endeavour.'[73] However, as Saumarez Smith has noted on the work of the leftist planner Graeme Shankland, Labour attitudes to modernity could also be accompanied by a concern for the traditional. Crosland, he suggests, was one such individual who 'did not consider it contradictory to be simultaneously an advocate of modernization and conservation.'[74] In this regard, *Socialist Commentary*'s 1961 town and country planning piece, 'The Face of Britain', was able to point to the 'planning' of the Georgian era whilst decrying the Industrial Revolution for losing this noble impulse and bequeathing a 'hideous legacy of derelict towns and scarred countryside.'[75] Bold planning schemes, such as Donald Gibson's creation of pedestrianised shopping areas in Coventry, were thus suggested to be 'the only way of preserving the civilised amenities of towns.'[76]

Labour were clearly willing to act as the guardians of old England even as they built the future. Eccleshall has claimed that Labour was 'no less inclined than its principal rival to deploy an episodic discourse in presenting itself as the party most in touch with the cultural residues of a thousand glorious years.'[77] To this end, through their observations of a quite different setting to Coventry – late 1950s Woodford –Willmott and Young felt that 'in England the new is only acceptable if it embodies the old, and nowhere has this lesson been more fully learnt than in house-design.'[78] They were of course measuring success on the basis of middle-class preference, but as has been asserted in the third chapter, architectural modernism seemed to be most effective when the future was tinged with the past. Conekin has suggested that the built past represented at the Festival was consciously 'Georgian', regarded by the Festival's planners as 'both refined *and* popular; modern yet stable.'[79] If the Festival typified an initial phase of Labour modernity, then the Lansbury Estate was in principle less a violent break with the past than a rejection of some of it. This was perhaps more in tune with the potential views of their voters than might have been

[73] Ibid., 176.
[74] Saumarez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland', 395. It should be noted that Shankland was a Communist, although he worked closely with Labour boroughs such as Liverpool.
[75] LHA, *Socialist Commentary*, 'Face of Britain' (September 1961), i.
[76] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (June 1959), 6.
[77] Eccleshall, 'Party Ideology and National Decline', 161.
[78] Young and Willmott, *Family and Class* (London, 1960), 11.
[79] Conekin, *Autobiography of a nation* (Manchester, 2003), 88.

expected. The report of a visit to the Soviet Union in 1950 by a delegation of twenty British trade unionists noted especially the quality of rebuilding in Kiev and Stalingrad, writing that 'they are not building utility structures, but are adapting the older traditions in the most pleasing way imaginable.'[80] The sentiment of adapting the old to fit the new was not unusual, regardless of the political preferences of the shop stewards involved. As the previous chapter has examined, this appreciation for architecture and modern vision both sides of the Iron Curtain was commonplace in Labour thinking. In the earlier post-war period, the new was most championed when it seemed to embody the best of the old.

As the 1950s went on, modernity acquired an introspective meaning for Labour. Rather than simply indicating the journey to utopia, the label of 'modern' began to become a means of assessing whether Labour was in tune with the voting public. Black has suggested that the core question of the fifties was 'whether social change had undermined and outdated the left's appeal or whether this required more effective articulation.'[81] For figures such as Gaitskell, modernity was as much a state of being as a transformative force, though as the previous section has suggested, this owed as much to Gaitskell's dread of Labour being dragged down by its own dogmatism as to anything else. By contrast, the December 1955 *Labour Woman* editorial interpreted the NEC decision at the annual conference of that year to release a number of policy statements as 'not intended to rewrite our fundamental principles but to restate them in terms that are relevant to the age of automation and atomic power.'[82] The issue here, as explored from the angle of heritage in the previous section, was whether 'Labour modernity' reflected the affluent age in which it existed. Whilst senior revisionists like Crosland and Jay, in addition to some of their allied correspondents in *Socialist Commentary*, believed that in 1955 it largely did not, left-wing publications such as *Tribune* were far more of the attitude that the socialist imagining of the modern future simply needed more explanation.

In a November 1955 report on the New Town of Peterlee, built to house mining families in County Durham, *Tribune*'s correspondent claimed that the most impressive feature of the town was 'the human, intimate, un-pompous way

[80] LHA, British Workers' Delegation, *Russia With Our Own Eyes*, 19.
[81] Black, *Political Culture of the Left*, 1.
[82] LHA, *Labour Woman* (December 1955), 186.

in which things were done, and the constant thought for the needs of the individual.'[83] Notably, *Tribune*'s interest in individual needs extended to the material. The article went on to observe that Peterlee's sister town Newton Aycliffe had had to increase its provision of car garages, and the correspondent claimed he had remarked upon a 'strange scarcity of television aerials" to Peterlee's housing manager, who responded "…folk here mostly have indoor aerials. You see, they feel no need to prove they've got the TV."'[84] In a further visit to Peterlee in a 1956 *Labour Woman*, a Mrs Armstrong was described to have struggled to make her old mining cottage a 'centre of comfort' for her family where 'there was not one thing to ease the burden of domestic chores.' Emphasising her fortuitousness in securing a home in the New Town, the piece stated that Mrs Armstrong now 'just revels in life at Peterlee after her grim struggle to live comfortably under bad conditions.'[85] Peterlee was doubtless the focus of attention of these pieces due to the Labour domination of the mining areas – the New Town really was 'their' project. Nonetheless, the appreciation for the desires of individuals would seem to suggest that the concern of the revisionist thinkers that Labour (and especially the Labour left) did not understand the materiality of the modern age was at times misplaced. Where Labour ideas of modernity could be perceived as outmoded was when a socialist utopia of 1945 vintage was being presented as something new. It was in opposition to these occasional bouts of hoariness that the revisionists stood – not in opposition to a socialist utopia *per se*.

A further opportunity to reassess Labour urban modernity was provided by the 1959 election defeat. Whilst, under Gaitskell's leadership, Labour had presented a 'modern' face in the manner the revisionists desired, it did not succeed as expected at the ballot box. This was in spite of the ebullient tone struck by policy statements such as *Leisure for Living*, which expressed the desire to give all 'a better chance than now of enjoying life to the full out of working hours.'[86] There emerged a concern within Labour ranks that the party had concentrated too much on the rhetorical practice of appearing modern, and too little on presenting an appealing socialist alternative to Conservative government. In particular, science returned to the fore as a less contentious

[83] LSEA, *Tribune* (4 November 1955), 155.
[84] Ibid.
[85] LHA, *Labour Woman* (August 1956), 117.
[86] LSEA, Labour Party, *Leisure for Living*, 7.

foundation of Labour modernity, promising the consumer technology as well as the rational planning that Labour believed voters wanted. Moreover, Labour began to position the resumption of the march to socialist modernity as the antidote to perceived economic, political and social decline.[87]

The ultimate product of these discussions was the policy statement *Signposts for the Sixties*, published in 1961, which declared Labour's intention to 'harness the forces released by science in the service of the community.'[88] *Signposts for the Sixties* placed particular emphasis on urban 'squalor' and decay, contrasting the USA 'with a continent to exploit' with the contemporary experience of Britain, suggesting that 'this kind of *laissez faire* makes it impossible to live decently in either town or country.'[89] In a similar manner, Crosland would write in 1962 on the 'property-owning democracy' of the USA that 'we neither want nor could achieve the precise American pattern in Britain', suggesting that property would need to be carefully distributed for widespread owner-occupation to be equitable.[90] This almost mechanistic insistence on a carefully planned modern future was, if anything, more authentically 'modern' in the abstract. The return of science to the core of Labour visions of the future was the 'heroic modernism' that characterised the imaginings of Le Corbusier and Gropius.[91] In a 1961 pamphlet entitled *Science and the Future of Britain*, Labour claimed that 'the Welfare State is grounded in science and without it would be impossible', stating that the spread of 'leisure and comfort' were derived from scientific discovery.[92] Further to this, Labour argued that British society needed to 'adjust to a world shaped by science', implying that the Conservative government were failing to do so.[93]

Following Gaitskell's death in 1963 and Wilson's accession to the leadership, science became still more critical in Labour projections of modern life. Wilson's invocation of the 'White Heat of technology' in his 1963 conference speech ensured that the Wilson government when it won power in 1964 could present itself as consciously technocratic.[94] In this light, *Science*

[87] Eccleshall, 'Party Ideology and National Decline', 171.
[88] LHA, Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties*, 7.
[89] Ibid., 23.
[90] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 39.
[91] Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism*, 120.
[92] LHA, LP/329.12, Labour Party, *Science and the Future of Britain* (1961), 5.
[93] Ibid., 3.
[94] Glen O'Hara, ''Dynamic, Exciting, Thrilling Change': the Wilson Government's Economic Policies, 1964-70', *Contemporary British History*, 20:3 (2006), 383-42 at 385.

and the Future of Britain had asserted that a civil service comprised of technical experts would be more effective than 'the 19th century myth that administration is an art that comes naturally to gentlemen well-educated in the classics.'[95] Both urban planning and the provision of housing were judged exceptionally in need of expertise. There was some irony to this, given the difficulties the party had faced in utilising its own Research Department. In a 1960 memorandum co-written with the heads of the International and Commonwealth Departments, the then-Research Secretary, Peter Shore argued against merging the three units, the proposal seemingly due to claims of inefficiency.[96] Shore and his colleagues argued that 'we are strongly persuaded of the advantages wherever possible of developing specialist knowledge', though conceding that presenting policy work had not been as successful as might have been hoped.[97]

Even if Labour's own operation had its shortcomings, the importance of the grand, planned project in Labour conceptions of modernity was particularly evident in a 1966 *Labour's Northern Voice* piece by Frank Allaun. A photograph of terraces being bulldozed in Salford, with new flats being put up behind it was accompanied by a caption reading: 'Down with the old, up with the new. What we want to see' – which would seem to confirm Samuel's later contention that modernity was at its core about removing 'out-of-date' or obsolete buildings and layouts.[98] Allaun went on to recount a humorous story of a soldier coming home to his slum house in Oldham on leave and being so raised to passion in decrying 'the rats, bugs, lice and filth' of his home, that he threw a grenade in the rickety outside lavatory. His father then said to him 'Son, tha shudna dun that: thi ma were in there!'[99] What Allaun's black humour was meant to demonstrate was the rage of Labour activists at homes like this *still existing* in 1966; in point of fact, Allaun remarked that 'in certain towns I could mention the waiting list for a council house is 19 years!'[100]

The 'White Heat' phase of Labour modernity was thus an attempt to finally finish the road to the socialist future started by the 1945 government, through the application of science to building techniques and domestic life.

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[95] LHA, Labour Party, *Science*, 28.
[96] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE 3/71, 'Evidence to Staff Salaries Sub-Committee at Transport House' (3 February 1960), 1.
[97] Ibid., 2-3.
[98] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (February 1966), 1; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), 67.
[99] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (February 1966), 1.
[100] Ibid.

Crucially, at the level of central government this was, as Saumarez Smith has asserted, a briefer moment than has been imagined.[101] Diminishing funding played a part, but moves to conservationism in the recognition that cyclical slum clearance was not a feasible policy was an even stronger motive. However, it should not be overlooked that 'Labour modernity' continued apace at the *local* level – plans drawn up by Labour controlled local authorities, whilst altered by changes in central government subsidy, were carried out into the 1970s. John Gold makes the point that this was no sudden break, noting that major figures such as Sir Hugh Casson claimed as late as 1973 that the gradual retreat from modernism represented 'a paralysis of the nation's cultural nerve.'[102] Urban transformation of the kind demanded by modernity continued, amongst others, in Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow well after the weakening of modernist impulses in Whitehall.

It is crucial to additionally discuss the challenge to Labour ideas of modernity posed by conservationist feeling at all levels. Whilst the previous two chapters have discussed the reactions to urban planning and slum clearance, not least by many Labour supporters by the 1960s, the 'heritage turn' that replaced modernity was a phenomenon of similar strength. It might be said that it is largely overlooked that the present delight for Victoriana is even a phenomenon at all. The palpable sense that urban modernity was an aberration is such that the dominance of 'heritage' architecture and 'heritage' influenced planning schemes can be construed as a return to normality, rather than a cultural turn with important social, political and architectural effects. In this respect, Glendinning and Muthesius are prescient in their observation that 'before the 1960s, to praise Victorian terraces or tenements and attack Modern dwellings, however complex one's arguments, could only have seemed sophistic, if not incomprehensible.'[103] The tone of studies such as the sociologist Anthony Richmond's examination of 'twilight areas' in Bristol, conducted from 1966, was not complimentary about the state of the formerly grand Victorian terraces and Georgian squares of Montpelier and St Paul's.[104] Given the immigration of West Indian families to the areas examined and

[101] Saumarez Smith, 'Central Government and Town-Centre Redevelopment', 244.
[102] Gold, *Practice of Modernism*, 284.
[103] Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 326.
[104] Richmond, *Migration and Race Relations*, 52-3. Portland Square in St Paul's is in fact still in a state of serious dereliction.

worsening conditions for them, Richmond saw the rehabilitation of the squares as a necessity, but in contrast to studies such as Norman Dennis' defence of a working-class area in Sunderland, without much sentimentality for the architecture itself.[105]

What did link these two studies was a shared unease for the fate of the people living within the decaying areas. As has been noted in the second chapter, growing public concern over the deterioration of still-inhabited inner city areas as a consequence of slum clearance was given a popular platform, most notably in Ken Loach's 1966 BBC television drama *Cathy Come Home*. Depicting the appalling state of housing in clearance areas through the tragedy of a young couple forced into homelessness, an emotional public response to *Cathy Come Home* helped to create the conditions for a further analysis of slum clearance policy, as well as directly leading to the creation of the charity Crisis the following year. The creation of the housing charity Shelter in 1966 by the church minister Bruce Kenrick and journalist Des Wilson was especially reflective of public anxiety over slum clearance. Moreover, Shelter and another key 1960s charity, the Child Poverty Action Group, included in their membership several key public policy thinkers within Labour, such as Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend. Given that Shelter's aim was to raise housing standards for those living in poor conditions, and to put a roof over the heads without a home at all, the charity were initially concerned most by the slowdown in slum clearance. A 1967 report entitled *Back to school: from a holiday in the slums* investigated children living in unfit and overcrowded housing. The report argued that 'it is within our power to rescue thousands of promising children from the wasteland', going on to quote from an anonymous social worker that 'children respond well to rehousing.'[106] In this regard Shelter were not necessarily averse to slum clearance – more to the conditions that had arisen from the slow pace of it. However, a campaign booklet of the same year stated that Shelter's primary method was to distribute money raised by the charity to voluntary housing associations, which would then buy and improve houses.[107] With the likelihood that the houses housing associations could buy would be

[105] Dennis, *People and Planning*. As the two previous chapters have mentioned, Dennis felt that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the one-storey Sunderland cottages at risk of redevelopment.
[106] LSE Archive, Abel-Smith Papers, ABEL-SMITH 4/3, Shelter, *Back to school: from a holiday in the slums* (1967).
[107] LSE Archive, Abel-Smith Papers, ABEL-SMITH 4/3, Shelter, Campaign Booklet, (1967).

vacant or cheap slum properties, Shelter were advocating a policy of slum improvement rather than clearance: in effect, conservation through expediency rather than a particular liking for old houses. *Labour's Policy for Old Houses* in 1963 had of course proposed this, but it was not until 1968 that *Old Houses into New Houses* would officially signal the Labour turn to conservation. What the work of Shelter and others in the decaying inner city demonstrates is the sluggishness of the modern project by the mid-1960s. With thousands trapped in substandard housing and modern homes yet to be built, a policy of improvement seemed a far more plausible option.

To a degree, the move towards rehabilitation of older urban areas aligned with a growing rejection of the modern project, but the additional circumstances of gentrification of older areas further complicates this picture. Ruth Glass had described the movement of middle-class families into older working-class areas in London as early as 1964, but as noted, accommodation in 'twilight areas' was also rented or bought by poorer immigrant families in relatively large numbers.[108] Michael Young had likewise commented on the middle-class liking for Georgian or Victorian homes as early as 1956, suggesting that the terrace could yet be a favourable home for the working classes given rehabilitation, in one of his broadsides against the New Towns.[109] However, large-scale gentrification and action against comprehensive redevelopment was not widespread in Britain until the late 1960s, although in cities such as Cambridge, certain streets or neighbourhoods were preserved on the grounds of 'heritage' value at the discretion of the council.[110] Whilst gentrification has more generally been understood as a process of reconstructing the inner city, led by the bourgeois and bohemian, the march of the (comparatively smaller groups of) middle classes in the later sixties and early seventies were accompanied by a strident appreciation for the 'period' home.[111]

Considering what was perhaps the earliest form of gentrification in London, in Islington and Canonbury in the mid-1960s, Joe Moran has suggested that the 'cultural politics' of home refurbishment and urban

[108] Ruth Glass, *London: Aspects of Change* (London, 1964), xvii.
[109] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (November 1954), 311.
[110] Phil Child, 'Slum clearance and attitudes towards social housing in Cambridge, 1950-75', unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge (2012), 66.
[111] Chris Hamnett, 'Gentrification and the Middle-class Remaking of Inner London, 1961-2001', *Urban Studies*, 40:12 (2003), 2401-2426 at 2402.

conservation promulgated by this pioneering wave have been established in contemporary culture.[112] In particular, Moran articulates the curious meeting of old and new in the habit of middle classes for 'knocking through' the interior walls of terraced houses and the removal of carpets to reveal the original boards as a 'signifier of modernity and freedom.'[113] The refitting of a terrace or villa into a bourgeois home was in this light not quite a refutation of modernity. Even so, as houses were 'simultaneously modernised and antiqued' in Samuel's memorable remark, the introduction of Conservation Areas through the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 was a clear impediment to the idea that modern dwellings should by necessity replace 'obsolete' older housing.[114] Moreover, whilst the modernist trope that the new should decisively sweep away the old had considerable nuance in Labour hands, allowing the retention of larger and larger areas of 'period' housing could only serve to diminish the effectiveness of redevelopment schemes. Crucially, as Chapter Three has explored, allowing a 'period' aesthetic to gradually supersede the modern as the paramount architecture of contemporary Britain could only lead to the end of the modern project.

In considering how 'Labour modernity' ultimately faltered, a further shift in the late 1960s was in the changing composition of local Labour parties. Though the 1955 Wilson Report into party culture and organisation had found that Labour were 'using the penny farthing in the jet engine age', a follow up report by *Socialist Commentary* ten years later entitled 'Our Penny Farthing Machine' suggested that little had changed, with 'squalor and amateurism' the main hallmarks of the Labour Party.[115] The report's description of dull, bureaucratic meetings with limited discussion of socialism or party policy gave the impression that Michael Stewart's 1955 call for a reassertion of socialist principles had had little effect.[116] However, the rise in 'New Left' thinking and interest in ideas of participatory democracy amongst younger socialists began to lead to greater dissent within local parties, particularly following the enormous local election losses of 1968.[117] Some evidence of this can be witnessed in a

[112] Moran, 'Early Cultures of Gentrification', 102.
[113] Ibid. 103.
[114] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 70; Andreae, 'From comprehensive development to Conservation Areas', 140.
[115] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (October 1965), iv.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Fielding and Tanner, ''Rise of the Left Revisited', 219.

1968 LPRD memorandum on the conduct of Labour council groups by the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Sir Mark Henig. In the memorandum, Henig remarked that 'over the years there has developed amongst some councillors an attitude that doing their job on the council is an alternative to playing their part in the local Party.'[118] Henig's comment would seem to suggest that some councillors, at least, did not regard their interpretation of party policy as being accountable to their local party. Though a rise in well-organised hard left activity was yet to come, as Steven Fielding and Duncan Tanner have pointed out in their study of party culture in Manchester and Salford there was by the late 1960s a perception that the local party elites were 'transgressing a core feature of party tradition – its commitment to democratic decision making.'[119] The growth of local community associations and groups concerned with urban conservation, or simply resistance to comprehensive redevelopment, across Britain often had Labour members in their ranks directly opposing the will of the ruling Labour council.[120] Though Tom Forester has claimed that the presence of middle-class Labour activists did not always ensure that local Labour parties pursued 'middle class policies', the gentrifiers in Islington described by Joe Moran certainly were of the left and did form groups opposing further redevelopment.[121] This 'defection' of parts of Labour's support to the cause of conservation marked the disappearing trust amongst activists that 'Labour modernity' could and would be delivered.

Discussing Labour politics in Newham in a 2014 interview, the current MP for East Ham Stephen Timms remarked that on the Little Ilford council estate by the early 1980s 'there were still people there who were very, very angry that the council had bought up the previous housing and demolished it and replaced it with tower blocks.'[122] As a fairly representative example of the more humdrum redevelopment that characterised much of Labour's housing policy in Newham, the Little Ilford estate was indeed a replacement of an old parish area by a large new estate of medium rise blocks. It may have been the

[118] LHA, LPRD Re/394, Sir Mark Henig, 'The Role of the Labour Group' (December 1968).
[119] Fielding and Tanner, 'The 'Rise of the Left Revisited', 223.
[120] Cambridge was a case in point, with the resistance to redevelopment in the 'Kite' area including some sitting left-wing Labour councillors by the early 1970s. See Phil Child, 'Slum clearance and attitudes towards social housing in Cambridge, 1950-75', unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge (2012), chapter 3.
[121] Forester, *Labour Party and the Working Class* (London, 1976), 123; Moran, 'Early Cultures of Gentrification', 114.
[122] Interview with Stephen Timms MP, Portcullis House, Westminster (24 July 2014).

case that some Labour activists began to feel that further redevelopment of the kind desired by municipal elites was not the best route to the socialist future, and worse, did not represent the will of the people. Timms went on to recall of the Little Ilford council estate that

> there was a man who was slightly deranged, he used to write to me every few weeks, in red pen about the fact that Newham council had stolen his home, and demolished it, and dumped him in this horrible tower block. For him, it was a traumatic experience.[123]

It could almost be said that the growing sense that modernity was, for many, a 'traumatic experience' was what stifled the application of it. Although as has been stated, 'Labour modernity' continued to a lesser degree into the 1970s, it was not marked by the *élan* of the White Heat. By the close of the 1960s, modernity was less a dynamic flourish of socialist utopianism than a painstaking, painful process. If, as this thesis has argued, the concept of modernity is a means of appreciating the extent and ambition of urban transformation in the post-war period, then the demise of modernity as the spirit of the age anticipated the end of a tempestuous phase in urban Britain.

Conclusion

Gazing over the city of Bristol in 1958 from the fourteen-storey Barton House block, the young Labour MP for Bristol South-East Tony Benn was moved to recount in his diary that 'to see the bright airy rooms with the superb view and to contrast them with the poky slum dwellings of Barton Hill below was to get all the reward one wants from politics.'[124] Benn's confidence that from the top of a modern, high-rise block, one could have the sense that 'this' was politics epitomises modernity as Labour saw it – bringing progress to the people. Indeed, Benn himself would in some ways personify Labour's future-chasing outlook, becoming the Minister of Technology in the Wilson government. Perhaps an even more telling indication of 'Labour modernity' was the following

[123] Ibid.
[124] Benn, *Years of Hope*, 289. Barton House was at the centre of the redeveloped Barton Hill area of east Bristol, and Hilda Jennings' study of the new estate is discussed extensively in the third chapter of this thesis.

note by Benn in that day's entry, in which he asserted that 'the people were happy, despite the grumbles about detail.'[125] It was these 'grumbles about detail', however, that would play a part in ensuring that Labour's modern, socialist future was not achieved. Interviewed for a 1970 BBC television documentary on the creation of his Brutalist planned estate at Poplar in East London, Robin Hood Gardens, the architect Peter Smithson haughtily stated that 'it is a model, an exemplar of a new mode of urban organisation.'[126] Whether intentionally or not, Smithson seemed to give the impression that the failure of 'grumblers' and the like to appreciate this 'exemplar' of modernity would be their tragedy. Though not all within Labour shared this outlook entirely, as this chapter has demonstrated, at points Labour did express the belief that opposing urban modernity was tantamount to opposing progress. The party's understanding of its own history and of the process of historical change was also pivotal. Despite the seeming timelessness of Labour's aims, it is clear that by the beginning of the 1970s, the modern project had reached a state of near exhaustion. The continuation of the modernist ideal – originally conceived in the early twentieth century – over the better part of the remainder of the century betrayed an ideological inflexibility on urban issues. Labour believed that their vision of the future was so compelling that they cleaved to the original imagining of it, even when these dreams of a better tomorrow were no longer applicable.

Writing in 1987, the urban historian Martin Daunton remarked upon what he saw as a tendency in urban histories to view the past 'as if the end result were obvious.'[127] This thesis has set out to challenge the oft-expressed contemporary belief that the urban transformation of Britain in the post-war years was necessarily doomed to failure, with advocates of the modern project either cynics or simply fools. There is some irony in this narrative, in that it is the inverse of the belief of Labour members throughout the same period that the modern project would inevitably succeed, in spite of setbacks. According to the former point of view, it was Robin Hood Gardens and similar developments that were an aberration of history – by the terms of the latter, the continued

[125] Ibid.
[126] BBC, 'The Smithsons on Housing' (1970), accessed online 25 May 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH5thwHTYNk This is not to dismiss the worth of Robin Hood Gardens, at present under threat of demolition.
[127] Daunton, *Property-Owning Democracy*, 40.

existence of blackened terraced and tenements was the abnormality. Daunton went on to write that the issue with this dismissive approach to urban history was that 'it does not begin to appreciate the range of views which were held tenaciously at the time and which subsequently disappeared from the discourse on policy.'[128] The adherents of Labour, as this chapter has discussed, sincerely believed that their interpretation of the modern future would come to pass and that Labour, as Clare Griffiths has noted, 'was in tune with the direction of historical change.'[129] With history on their side, Labour assumed somewhat incongruously that they could look back to the road not taken to a Labour government in the 1930s, and deliver their vision of working-class prosperity on their terms. Whilst Crosland and his fellow revisionists would attempt to arrest an over-focus on the 1930s, the feeling that Conservative government in the wake of the Great Depression had stalled real progress, particularly in housing, was a common refrain of Labour members. Equally, the fervour of the party hatred for 'Victorian' squalor was palpable – as observed in this chapter, Labour rarely missed an opportunity to denounce the evils of industrial capitalism and promote a more appealing socialist utopia. As observed throughout this thesis, if virtually all of the 'Victorian' city was a bad legacy, then virtually all of the Victorian city could be considered obsolete. This standpoint ultimately faltered on the basis that it was an interminable aim – it was not physically possible to replace every single old home in Britain, nor was it deemed truly desirable.

Reference to the past became still more essential to Labour rhetoric after 1951, with the record of the Attlee government on housing as well as perceived missed opportunities drawn upon to inform the political direction of travel. If anything, this contemplation has been the most long-lasting of Labour calls to the past. In 2013, the then-Labour leader Ed Miliband drew upon the legacy of the 1945-51 government to promote his own plans for government, stating in an interview that 'If you go into the roots and history of the Labour party and think about our most dramatic society-changing government, the 1945 government, we all remember the NHS, building homes, and the family allowance.'[130] Miliband's exhortation to the ancestral voices was not exceptional amongst contemporary Labour leaders – even Tony Blair was willing to praise aspects of

[128] Ibid., 41.
[129] Griffiths, 'History and the Labour Party', 286.
[130] *The Guardian* (21 June 2013) accessed online 8 June 2016 at http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jun/21/labour-radical-change-austerity-ed-miliband.

the Attlee government amidst his iconoclastic vision.[131] What Miliband's remembrance demonstrated was the same habit that Labour collectively displayed in the post-war period – a tendency to sneak glances backwards at the same time as purposefully striding forwards. The essentially inimical character of this thinking undermined the modern project – it was ultimately not possible to sweep away the past, whilst idealising aspects of another past.

The purpose of this chapter has been to enhance historical understanding of the assumptions and abstractions that lay behind Labour's mission to transform the post-war urban environment. A key element of this was where ideals of modernity met urban policy – Labour's enthusiasm for the new was evident in the Festival of Britain, in modern developments and in the party reasoning for slum clearance, amongst other aspects. However, Labour's own narrow party culture was hardly modern, with considerable dissonance between the ideals of the centre of the party and its local expressions. As the examples of Birmingham and Newham in particular show, the insularity of some local parties meant that 'Labour modernity' could vary considerably in its application. More consistent was a belief in progress and the sense that a modern, socialist society was within the party's grasp. The 'White Heat' moment of the mid-1960s was perhaps the most iconic manifestation of 'Labour modernity', but both the vision of the Attlee government and the revisionist attempts to fit affluence to modernism in documents such as *Leisure for Living* were also evocative of what the Labour Party considered to be the future. It is reasonable to state that Labour's modern vision diminished in its impact as time went on – by the 1960s, the basic rhetoric of 'down with the old and up with the new' had not changed exponentially from thirty years earlier. In this regard, the rejection of modernity was comprehensible, but it was not inevitable. Further to this, if the concept of modernity was based on the abandonment of a somewhat contrived past for an idealised future, then the conservationist ethic that replaced it was almost a satire of this – idealising elements of the past and casting aside an unwanted future. Labour's passion for a specifically modern, urban future may have been misplaced by the late 1960s – but the devotion to it was real enough.

[131] Griffiths, 'History and the Labour Party', 297.

Conclusion

The Labour Party and Urban Modernity, 1945-70

Can Labour's urban ambitions be judged a success? The left-wing Labour MP Frank Allaun sounded a sombre note in *Labour's Northern Voice* of May 1970. One month prior to the heavy Labour defeat in the general election of that year, Allaun asked his readers why his constituency advice bureau might be especially busy on Sunday mornings after a wet week. The answer, Allaun asserted, was that private tenants had 'rain pouring through the roof and soaking the bedding' – and worse, that it was 'the devil's own job to get the landlord to do the repairs.'[1] After six years of Labour government, with housing given a high priority even in the face of financial constraints, it might be asked why leaking roofs and parsimonious landlords had not been banished to the past. Looking back to 1960, Allaun told a similar tale – he wrote, again in *Labour's Northern Voice*, of homes without baths, long council waiting lists and greedy landlords.[2]

This thesis has analysed the journey to utopia as much as the purported final destination – the physical, political and social effects of a belief in the *potential* of decisive change, and *why* that belief came about within the Labour Party. In this regard, it is the first comprehensive study of the manner in which Labour reshaped the urban environment in the period 1945-70. It has done so by considering the ideas that constituted Labour as an active force on policy – modernity and socialism – even if these ideas seem difficult to credit in the present day. Moreover, this thesis has explored key aspects of urban environments: the operation of the housing market; planning; land use; slum clearance and redevelopment; transport; issues of class, community and the appeal of modern design; and the place of history and party culture in Labour's understanding of modernity. In taking account of Labour ideas *and* Labour actions, this thesis has made the case for looking more closely at the politics of urban transformation in post-war Britain.

[1] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (May 1970), 1.
[2] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (December 1960), 6.

Over the course of this thesis, four key research questions have guided the inquiry into Labour's approach to urban policy. This conclusion details how they have been answered in each chapter, but each question will be stated here with brief responses. Firstly, how did those within Labour understand 'modernity' and its relationship to the notion of 'progress' – and what did this mean for housing and the urban environment? Whilst the views of Labour members were by no means homogenous, there was, broadly, a convoluted sense that urban modernity was both a radical act of creating utopia and the fulfilment of socialist tradition. This byzantine pairing of past and future enabled Labour to build starkly modern housing whilst claiming it was the just reward of the worker for suffering the Industrial Revolution. Secondly, why did slum clearance and urban redevelopment often result in 'modern' forms of housing – and why is the legacy of this sort of housing in particular so contested? As the quintessential act of modernity – through destruction of the built past – the creation of modern housing following slum clearance can be seen as a statement of intent. Equally, the pragmatism of building a block of flats in a recently cleared area, as a more efficient use of space, arguably conceded a certain superiority to 'modern' housing. Thirdly, how did Labour actors understand 'modern life', in terms of housing and the urban environment? Those within Labour developed an elaborate, and multifaceted sense of what modern life should look like, both inside and outside the home. Crucially, these beliefs were informed by a variety of sources: social science research, socialist yearnings and personal preference. Fourthly, why did Labour actors regard quality housing as a solution to urban deprivation – and why did urban poverty remain resilient throughout the post-war era? As the quote from Allaun demonstrates, poor housing was seen as synonymous with poor people by Labour actors, but the enormity (and questionable plausibility) of the task of removing all or even most poor housing from Britain left Labour at a loss. More troubling was the fact that certain categories of poverty slipped through the welfare state, ensuring that penury could exist amongst those in adequate accommodation.

These research questions have enabled the complexities of urban transformation in twentieth century Britain to be brought to the fore, and invited the study of political aims as a part of this process. In doing so, the manner in

which political parties engage with contemporary cultural or intellectual currents – and what effect this has had on policy – has been uncovered.

Considering the Politics of Urban Transformation

Labour Minister for Housing Anthony Greenwood, introducing the second reading of the 1969 Housing Act to the House of Commons in February 1969, stated that 'while we improve the houses, so, too, must we improve the environment around them.'[3] The focus of the 1969 Act was to increase improvement grants to update older properties – the outcome of the 1968 Labour white paper *Old Houses into New Homes* – marking a shift in policy to improvement. Greenwood went on to observe that

> it is not enough to give the housewife a sparkling new stainless steel sink with constant hot water, if her only view from the kitchen window is one of smoky, treeless dereliction and decay…we must heal the wounds of the Industrial Revolution.[4]

Whilst in some respects the 1969 Housing Act was a retreat from the modernist urge to break with the past, and in his speech Greenwood was clear in his willingness to retain older areas of the city that could be made good, his reference to the 'wounds' of the nineteenth century hinted at an ongoing struggle. It may have been the case that left-leaning figures like Greenwood believed that the *method* by which Labour could usher in a socialist, modern utopia was the issue, not the aim in itself. But as Latour observed, and has been advanced throughout this thesis, modernity was a concept based on contradiction – the removal of the past in totality was impossible. Labour's concept of modernity owed something to their political culture – they were, unlike their Conservative rivals, 'in many ways more at home in the 1940s than in the 1970s.'[5] This was an important distinction – Labour professed to be modern, but continually exhibited signs of anachronism – as it sheds light on

[3] *Hansard*, (Commons), 777 (10 February 1969), 963-1082, accessed online 14 June 2016 at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1969/feb/10/housing-bill#S5CV0777P0_19690210_HOC_406.
[4] Ibid.
[5] McKibbin, 'A Brief Supremacy', 12.

why the party, and by extension its urban policy, remained wedded to a set of modern ideas of older vintage so late into the period of study.

Modernity was a cultural phenomenon that was, in urban terms, at least as important as 'affluence' to political discourse in the 1950s and 1960s, and certainly as ambiguous. Labour's practice of modernity in the urban environment provides a further historical angle on the political representation of change in mid-twentieth century Britain – and considering that this change had a still-extant built legacy, a clear link between political thought and the construction of party policy. Modernism cannot, and should not, be reduced to the study of architecture – it was a cultural process with political expressions. Understanding how the demolition of nineteenth-century housing, the creation of the high-rise block, the spread of New Towns and even the coming of inner city motorways fit together is integral to a complete picture of post-war Britain.

Labour sought to build a modern, socialist future after 1945, both in and out of government. Although this vision was new in some respects, it was formed through earlier ideas. In a 1944 pamphlet produced by Labour, the New Zealand Labour politician Walter Nash described the 'constructive social achievements' of his party in government continuously since 1935.[6] On housing, Nash wrote that his party's policy was based on 'four essentials: no jerry-building; no exploitation of the housing shortage; stabilisation of rents; and security of tenure for tenants', going on to state that all houses under construction were of 'pleasing design', with at least sixty years' life to them.[7] Whilst the political circumstances of New Zealand were of course different to post-war Britain, Labour nevertheless shared the same 'essentials' in its own policies. The following will review how the chapters of this thesis have explored how the 'essentials' met a spirit of modern change, and a drive to create new socialist cities in Britain.

Chapter One examined Labour's approach to the housing market, advancing the case that the party considered housing to be of paramount importance to its plans for change. This belief became manifest in a 1950 *Labour Woman* editorial, which asserted 'if every family were properly housed

[6] LHA, LP/380.4, Walter Nash, *Social Progress in New Zealand* (1944), 4. The New Zealand Labour Party were in power for fourteen years from 1935-49, winning four general elections over the period.
[7] LHA, Nash, *Social Progress*, 14.

we would need fewer hospitals.'[8] In effect, the party associated good housing with radical change – the urban transformations that took place were at their core based on the perception that homes for all was a necessary part of socialism. Moreover, those within Labour actually considered how they might reshape the housing market in considerable detail. Whilst public housing has traditionally been the main focus of scholarship, abolition of the landlord and even the extension of owner-occupation were deliberated by the party. Labour's attempt to build a modern, socialist utopia through a dynamic shift in the structure of the housing market had tremendous effects on the way that Britain lived, and continues to do so in the present day.

The socialist, modern restructuring that the party envisaged focused on a reduction of the powers of private landlords. Writing in a 1958 edition of *Socialist Commentary*, the sociologist John Mogey argued that Labour should 'deal with English house landlords as Gladstone did with Irish farm landlords eighty years ago.'[9] Mogey referred to the nineteenth-century radical rent reform enacted by Gladstone's Liberal government, which severely reduced the powers of landowners across Ireland. As Chapter One has shown, Labour's visceral dislike of private landlordism was based on a sincere conviction that the state could do the task of renting homes out more effectively. This led to the policy proposal of municipalisation, though it was in part a response to the breakdown of rent control and a broader perception of market failure in the private rental market. Through taking over 'obsolete' rented properties in need of repair – with the tacit implication that *all* private rental properties could be deemed as such – Labour members saw municipalisation as a short-term means of widening public ownership. Nonetheless, Labour presented a surprisingly united front in wishing for the abolition of the landlord, with enthusiasm for the policy across the party spectrum throughout the 1950s and even into the 1960s. However, the few instances of municipalisation that did occur, most notably in Birmingham, were not especially successful – due to the sheer volume of bad properties in need of repair and finance required for this task, as well as the controversy of wholesale takeover of property by the state. Further to this, when returned to office in 1964, Labour did not carry out its mooted overhaul of the rental sector, instead taking the half-measures of the

[8] LHA, *Labour Woman* (November 1950), 218.
[9] LHA, *Socialist Commentary* (August 1958), 17.

1965 Rent Act and partial enforcement of property improvement. Whilst in many ways Labour's critique of the iniquities of the rental market were accurate, the party were ultimately unable and unwilling to carry out their more radical plans.

Chapter One additionally sought to challenge the scholarly perception that Labour were uninterested in owner-occupation. In fact, the party exhibited a cautiously positive attitude towards the prospect of greater owner-occupation throughout the post-war period – it was the private landlord owning several properties, not the *individual* owner, who was believed to be at the root of urban deprivation. Party proposals for the abolition of leaseholds in particular were couched in the same language of removing anachronism as many other consciously modern proposals. Yet the contradictions of Labour thought should not be dismissed out of hand. The owner-occupier was only able to be a part of the modern future if public housing was considered to be at an adequate level, and as a 1952 Labour paper observed 'private builders don't like building houses to let: they want a quick sale with ready money.'[10] Labour's fear was that the Conservative preference for owner-occupation would squeeze out public housing, and the article went on to note that 'Labour councils have refused to play the Tory game' by building council houses for rent.[11] In an electoral sense, Labour's obvious unwillingness to sacrifice the extension of public housing for owner-occupation made the party seem at times an unreliable champion of the private home. This was particularly so in the case of council house sales, the volume of which increased under Conservative councils from the late 1950s onwards – Labour's opposition to council house sales in the majority of cases prefigured the controversies of the better-known 'Right to Buy' policy of the 1980s. The collective basis of Labour's modernism meant that the owner-occupied house would remain a poor second to the council home.

Determining what, precisely, was the role of public housing in Labour's modern project was a further concern of Chapter One. In the existing historiography, it has been presented unambiguously as a 'vanguard' tenure – the instrument of stable tenure for Labour's working-class constituents. Whereas the class element of public housing was broached in Chapter Three,

[10] LHA, *People's Pictorial*, 2 (1952), 14.
[11] Ibid.

Chapter One explored how public housing fitted into the 'tenurial mix' of the housing market. If Labour thought placed a certain impetus on public housing as an equitable means of providing homes, the party were vaguer on whether the council house would become the primary means of tenure and how it should be financed. On this latter point, the party appeared incapable of setting a clear position on whether councils should impose a system of differential rents or rent rebates, or simply provide a universal, flat rent regardless of income. This was far from a minor wrangle – the perceived costs of public housing to the ratepayer would lead to the undermining of the tenure by the late 1960s. Labour's lack of enthusiasm for third-party forms of providing not-for-profit housing – through co-operatives, housing associations or trade unions – was indicative of the party's contorted sense of modernity. Public housing was clearly a key part of the 'modern' housing market, but the form in which it was provided was not new.

Labour's understanding of modernity meant a modern environment in the housing market. The party interpreted this in the light of their own socialism, which meant significant state intervention in the housing market. Ultimately, it was a case of, in Crosland's words, overcoming 'Conservative *priorities*.'[12] Tory faith in the market as a just provider of housing was, in Labour eyes, not simply wrong but an anachronism. Private landlordism was the most objectionable of the symbols of a past housing order, but Labour also sought to broaden owner-occupation in a fairer manner, and to ensure a ready supply of public housing for rent. In the view of those within Labour, modernity in the postwar housing market was a case of imposing discipline on a turbulent housing market.

Chapter Two was also focused on orderliness, though of a much broader kind. It principally sought to investigate the research question of why better housing was seen as a solution to urban deprivation, by considering all the parts of the city as Labour and urban planners did. Perhaps more than any other, this chapter captures Latour's comment that the notion of modernity was the *potential* to break with the past – the separation would occur through the creation of modern, socialist cities. Four areas of policy were investigated: planning (whether imagined or acted upon); land; slum clearance; and urban transport.

[12] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 195.

Planning, for Labour, was the reshaping of British cities. The party saw this as a necessary part of achieving socialism, by removing the visual signs of what the party saw as Victorian deprivation and replacing it with the gleaming innovation of a modern city. It is striking that the New Towns and the higher-rise manifestations of redevelopment within cities have emerged as the most prominent elements of post-1945 urban planning, given that they were only ever a proportion of the overall housing constructed within this period. Undoubtedly, such pre-eminence can be traced to the novelty of this kind of construction, and at least in part to the importance Labour placed on New Towns and redevelopment within cities. Whilst the New Town has been considered by historians such as Mark Clapson to be a suburban oddity within this utopian planning, it initially represented something rather different – New Towns were intended by Labour as entirely new settlements, with industrial sites and the town centres that 'out-country' estates had lacked. Whilst the industrial side of many New Towns did not survive, it is important to recognise that the New Town was created as a distinct *alternative* to the 'ribbon' suburb – and arguably remains distinct. Conversely, Labour saw the inner city as an area in which considerable redevelopment was paramount to rebuilding the city in a modern form. It was this as much as issues of space for building and the costs of financing such construction, that prompted the development of conspicuously modern buildings, including the high-rise blocks.

Labour plans for land control also exhibited irreverence towards the past, though principally in this case a more recent one: the urban 'sprawl' of the inter-war years. Although Labour politics remained energised about the prospect of greater land control throughout the post-war period, both the enormity of the task of effectively ending private ownership of land and party indecision on how best this might be done stymied this aspiration. The Land Commission of the Wilson governments, the eventual outcome of Labour's thinking in opposition, was far less effective than the product of the Attlee government; the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. This was in part due to the controversy of state expropriation of private land, which had been tested to a considerable extent under the auspices of the 1947 Act. Commenting as an planning expert on the draft of Labour's 1961 policy publication *Towns for Our Times*, which introduced an early form of the Land Commission, Mr A. Goodman suggested that the drafted use of language such as the 'willing sales' of land was unneeded.

Goodman stated that 'it must be plain that there will be no willing sales of land – except by the philanthropically minded on the basis of the new scheme.'[13] This comment illustrates the issues faced by Labour advocacy of the public ownership of land. Though a necessary part of realising any plans for modern, socialist cities, wholesale takeover of land was deemed too risky and so did not occur.

Slum clearance and the later policy of 'comprehensive redevelopment' were the most significant of Labour plans for urban transformation. In many ways, the demolition of old housing and reshaping of British cities through these processes was more controversial than the more eye-catching modernist architecture. The caricaturing of the Victorian city assured its destruction, as Labour members associated narrow terraced streets with urban poverty and inferior public health. Although this perception had some truth to it, Labour envisaged a cyclical demolition of 'obsolete' houses that would theoretically continue *ad infinitum*. *Towns for Our Times* gave a sense of the solemnity with which the party regarded this task, stating '…are our cities to be left to the dictates of "economic forces", and life within them allowed to become a nightmare? If we reject [this] we must be prepared to adopt bold remedies. There can be no compromise.'[14] The demolition of the old and the adoption of 'bold' planning schemes was therefore, in the view of Labour adherents, a positive act. Nonetheless, this most radical of modern acts faltered as it became apparent that the rehabilitation and improvement of the existing city, rather than its devastation, was better policy. Similarly, urban transport saw an evolution of policy, though in a manner that arguably was not reconciled as effectively as urban redevelopment was to preservation. For the modern cities that Labour members desired to function effectively, public transport links were crucial. In spite of this, Labour gradually began to champion development that favoured the motor car, undermining pedestrianised centres with inner city bypasses in cities such as Birmingham and Bradford. This closely followed the weakening of rail, bus and tram alternatives under the Conservative governments from 1951-64, with Labour doing little to reverse changes in government, or to support bus routes to isolated estates at the local level. Somewhat ironically, given the fact that party planning had been based on

[13] LHA, LPRD Rd/148, 'Comments by Experts: *Towns for Our Times*', (May 1961).
[14] LSEA, Labour Party, *Towns for Our Times*, 6.

ending car-led 'sprawl', the modern environment that Labour supported became the territory of the automobile.

Writing in a 1961 edition of *The Times* focused on architecture, the historian Nikolaus Pevsner asked the reader 'Why not harmonize the old and the new?' Pevsner argued that the best of the modern developments in urban Britain did not destroy the older aesthetics, but incorporated them within new construction, approvingly citing Harlow New Town and the LCC estate at Roehampton as examples of this.[15] His comments illustrate the contradiction at the heart of Labour's modern project – although the party wanted to remove the worst of the Victorian city and replace it with the new, it conflated urban deprivation with 'old buildings', with limited compromise on maintaining the better parts of cities. In this regard, Labour fell into the trap described by Latour, as they saw modernity as something more novel than '…small modifications of old beliefs.'[16] Indeed, Pevsner's contention that in the best of the modern built environment 'the old…reasserts itself in the new' prefigured the eventual move to preservation over demolition. Even if this was so, it should not be lost sight of that Labour's vision for modern, socialist cities was a genuine aspiration, co-existing with urban policy in the twentieth century. Whether feasible or not, understanding the reasoning behind the dream widens the comprehension of urban change in the post-war period.

Moving on from this investigation into planning, Chapter Three explored how the study of Labour's approach to modernity can enable a detailed discussion around issues of class, community and design in the period 1945-70. The ways in which these issues influenced Labour's urban policy was integral to the manner in which urban transformation took place. In creating new housing and changing the shape of British cities, Labour sought to create a 'model to the world.' This chapter therefore aimed to delve into the question of what Labour's understanding of modern life was, and how this affected its urban plans.

On the subject of class, Labour presented a conflicted viewpoint. The party wished for public housing to lose its residual connotations of being a 'slum tenure', which it had acquired in the 1930s, with one means of doing so to promote it as a universal tenure available to all. However, Sean Damer's

[15] LSEA, Shore Papers, SHORE/3/9, *The Times*, 'The Architect in Britain Today' (3 July 1961), xxiii.
[16] Latour, *We have never been modern*, 42.

description of an estate in Glasgow as a 'somewhat battered, but cheery place to live' was closer to what eventually emerged.[17] The paternalistic bent of Labour demanded that the party distribute housing to 'their people', by which the members of the party chiefly meant the working classes. Efforts to create a modern, classless tenure were thus undermined by Labour's own sense of itself.

A dubious concept of 'community' amongst Labour members, based on a semi-idealised form of working-class existence, also contributed to Labour's urban plans. These inclinations were reinforced by the findings of social scientists, particularly those supportive of and in communication with Labour, such as Michael Young. Whilst it appeared to be the case that the kind of 'modern life' desired by most people was one of greater privacy rather than collective closeness, Labour advanced the case that the only true form of community was an associative one, building this into the layout of estates. Most notably, the deck access of the Park Hill estate was praised as a remedy to 'isolating' high-rise blocks, though the lack of seclusion was later found to be a reason for tenant disapproval. As James MacColl observed in 1954, the majority wanted their own home, such as '…the old people who would like a little flat near, but not too near, their married children.'[18] The significant point was 'not too near' – Labour failed to recognise a popular desire for privacy, and judged estates on a set of false criteria.

The topic of design was also based on questionable principles, with the party eventually becoming more enthusiastic about highly modern flats on the basis that these could deliver homes with all the amenities that modern life required. Even so, it is arguable that the reaction to the 'modern home' envisaged by Labour was vitalised by similarly questionable points. On the terraced house, idealised by many reacting to the modern flat, Stefan Muthesius wrote in 1980 that 'the notion of the 'ideal' family dwelling is of comparatively *recent* date [my italics].'[19] In effect, while flats or modern dwellings were not necessarily the preferred option for all tenants, they were not always disliked either, and it is not clear that a fixed, 'ideal' housing form existed in the popular mindset for most of the period 1945-70. It is certainly the case that the

[17] Damer, *From Moorepark to 'Wine Alley'*, 136.
[18] LHA, MacColl, *Policy for Housing*, 9.
[19] Muthesius, *English Terraced House*, 146.

suburban character of New Towns was largely successful, but this did not suit everyone – for all the exaggeration of Young and Willmott, suburban issues were real enough. This being said, the modern flat was accepted by Labour with some reservations. In a 1961 edition of *Labour's Northern Voice*, the correspondent remarked that 'one accepts the inevitable development of high flats', but qualified his point with 'common sense demands opposition to those who clamour for blocks in every conceivable spot.'[20] This piece captured the sense that even if the exact form of modern flats was not always appreciated, they were seen as a means of removing slum dwellings. In essence, architectural modernism was for Labour a question of function over form – ensuring that the great majority could live in adequate homes with modern amenities.

Chapter Three argued that Labour's modern vision rested on a number of discordant assumptions about modern life. The party appeared to see the process of removing the slums and building new housing as a means of creating radically improved communities, but at the same time wanted the fundamental working-class base of their electorate kept intact. Although elements within Labour never fully accepted the modern dwelling as the preeminent form of public housing, modernist homes offered a decisive means of ending the slum conditions of the Victorian city. The debates over class, community and design emphasise the belief of Labour that radical, momentous change in the urban environment was not only possible, but desirable.

The political rationale of Labour members was at the core of all the urban transformations described and Chapter Four sought to investigate this dynamic. A substantial part of Labour's modernist reasoning originated from the party's understanding of its own socialism and the point at which it met the party's own perplexing sense of time. The practice of urban modernity, then, can be seen as a key part of Labour's unifying logic in action. There were obvious flaws to this logic – Labour members saw modern change as superseding temporality in a leap to socialism, when the party consistently referred to the past in proclaiming their modern credentials, emphasising the novel developments and partial affluence of the 1930s as a blueprint for contemporary modernity. Labour's own political culture informed and reinforced this paradoxical consciousness, with the party's analysis of its recent history underlining the

[20] WCML, Allaun Papers, *Labour's Northern Voice* (July 1961), 5.

complications with treating the past as a source of future action. Perhaps more than any other factor, the deepening of relative poverty in the 1960s was an uncomfortable intrusion into Labour's belief in continuous progress. Not only did the persistence of slum dwellings, and the categorisation of decaying housing as new slums, make Labour members feel that urban utopia was even further away, but they began to face additional electoral challenges. Writing in *Tribune* in May 1968, a former Labour councillor who had recently lost his seat in Notting Hill argued that 'housing conditions are probably worse now than in 1958', blaming the Conservative-led Kensington and Chelsea council.[21] The councillor in question was Bruce Douglas-Mann, who would become the MP for North Kensington in 1970, and from February 1974 to 1982 the MP for Mitcham and Morden. Douglas-Mann claimed that few of the slum tenants 'believed that their vote had any relevance to the conditions in which they lived', whilst the 'relatively comfortable' council tenants of his ward had voted Tory to protest at government economic policy and to show their opposition to immigration.[22] This was in many ways the worst of worlds for Labour actors: the slums seemed to be increasing, and those who had gained from Labour's modern vision (the council tenants) were not grateful to their patrons.

The reality of dismal slums in 1968 offered the unwelcome possibility to Labour that perhaps grand visions of urban transformation could not solve poverty, and indeed that even with cyclical removal of slums, hardship would not end. Nevertheless, Chapter Four stressed that Labour as a whole were slow to recognise that they could not continue to promote similar plans of wholesale reconstruction of the urban environment, even with the concession of improvement subsidies in the 1969 Housing Act. Even as the task of comprehensive redevelopment went on under Labour-controlled councils, the *intellectual* project of modernity had peaked. If anything, Labour's modernising spirit had failed on its own terms – if urban transformation could not break with the past and bring forth socialism, it was just another part of the historical canvas.

[21] LSEA, *Tribune* (10 May 1968), 6.
[22] Ibid.

Rethinking British Politics and the Urban Environment

Writing in 1962, Tony Crosland argued that although he believed that Labour and Conservative had intermingled on many subjects of policy, they did not share the same objectives. He described this crossover as a case of 'new moods, old problems': the style of Labour arguments might have changed, but the concerns of socialism remained in his view broadly the same.[23] Perhaps more than any other figure, Crosland embodied both the resolve of the Labour movement *and* its eccentric spirit of modernity. This thesis has taken the concept of modernity, and the ways in which Labour actors and others attempted to argue for and explain radical change as a means of understanding the momentous changes in Britain's urban environment between 1945 and 1970. Although there exist strong perceptions of why British cities were transformed in an almost avant-garde manner that arouses strong controversy even in the present day, the political reasoning behind *why* these changes occurred has not previously been interrogated. Moreover, in the process of consideration, this thesis has drawn together the social and cultural influences on Labour thought in an effort to situate the politics of urban transformation amidst a wider milieu. Without a clear comprehension of why despite the 'new moods', the 'old problems' retained their salience, significant gaps will remain in the study of urban Britain in the mid-twentieth century.

The modernist writer Marshall Berman acknowledged that the rise of anti-development movements headed by figures such as Jane Jacobs in New York had heralded the end of urban modernity, but he noted that these critiques were based on equally flawed assumptions. He asserted that Jacobs's account of the city, focused on the counter-culturalism of Greenwich Village, contained 'positively pastoral' visions of vibrant neighbourhoods without crime, and suggested that there was some irony in the contemporary 1970s obsession over vanished 'homes, the families and neighbourhoods' that many attacking modernism had 'left in order to be modern in the modes of the 1950s and 1960s.'[24] Berman's frustration at the popular disavowal of modernity in favour of a logic that he believed was poorer in ambition still forms one side of the argument about the urban modern moment in the twentieth century. The other

[23] Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy*, 241.
[24] Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 324.

side is provided by critics such as the intellectual historian Jackson Lears. In a recent review of Robert Caro's far-reaching biography of the 'modernist pharaoh' Robert Moses, he argued that any attempt to see the modernism that Moses' projects embodied as anything more than 'smashing up people's homes' was simply a '[fantasy] of urban liberation.'[25] In Lears' view, the destruction of old neighbourhoods was a catalyst for the shift to contemporary urban capitalism – the inner areas of London, New York, Paris and other Western cities becoming the centres of a new urban elite rather than the homes of ordinary people. Although Lears acknowledged that the endpoint of urban renewal promulgated by Jane Jacobs and others had had a role in this – namely, through 'gentrification' – his counter-argument sounded suspiciously like Michael Young's advocacy of an imagined, vigorously working-class Bethnal Green as the epicentre of community. The politics of urban transformation remain vibrant, and the past remains a contested space.

This study is as much a history of the postwar Labour Party as one of the development of the urban environment – and the narrative of the former is as disputed as the merits of comprehensive redevelopment. In depicting Labour thought in the course of urban policy, this thesis has shown in a practical sense how the more abstract elements of Labour's vision of socialist progress were actually realised (or not). Equally, this investigation allows a closer look at Labour's *intentions* versus the *outcomes* of the policies they pursued – tracing the reasoning behind particular urban policies can put political ideas into their contemporary place, rather than seeing them as oddities or aberrations in the present day. Intriguingly, the popular resonance of Labour's basic message – better housing, an end to slums – did not diminish over the period, even if the increasingly infinite time-frame of the policies that the party began to pursue did not endear them to the electorate. Labour's presentation of itself between 1945 and 1970 as a quintessentially *modern* movement, in touch with the guiding spirit of radical change, is integral to a clear understanding of how it met its aims with policies. Wilson's vision of the 'White Heat' of scientific progress was more than an economic way forward, it was also a path to the built future. Correspondingly, it should be noted that this sense of radical change worked on two levels – this thesis has attempted to situate Labour within the context of 'modernity', a cultural phenomenon that can be historicised, and Labour's

[25] *London Review of Books*, 38:6 (17 March 2016), 25-28 at 26.

socialist self-regard also enabled the party to view itself as forward-looking. Emily Robinson argues for 'progress' to be the dominant term of investigation, seeing it as tied to 'modernity'. This thesis advances the case that conflating the two terms is problematic when what participants described as modern, modernity and modernism in the postwar period has a particular context. In this regard, Robinson's linking of the 'modernising' efforts of New Labour with past phases of culturally distinct modernity is a little misplaced.[26] The intellectual efforts of Labour in the period 1945-70 to guide their project of urban transformation are more easily understood if united with a similarly novel cultural phenomenon.

Embracing the more abstract aspects of political discourse might make for more inquiring political and urban histories. Why have key terms utilised in both kinds of histories remained vague? Examining terms such as 'community', 'redevelopment' and even simply 'home' in greater depth than has been possible in this thesis might lead to the uncovering of significant layers of meaning. For example, much as 'modernity' was politically constructed in part when utilised by Labour, the understanding of what a good community was, and the role of various actors in creating this image could be crucial in determining the course of everyday life in the twentieth century. In a similar vein, it is apparent that some urban histories have a tendency to omit the influence of ideology in favour of rational, governmental policy-making in a sort of ironic return to older historiographical high political traditions. It has been asserted here that political parties and organisations did have different objectives, informed by their ideological leanings – whilst 'expertise' played a part, it was not the sole determinant of particular urban policies. In this regard, this thesis has hoped to encourage urban historians to take more notice of political thought and reasoning in appreciating changes to the urban environment.

Labour's ideological past still shapes today's British urban environment, yet these ideas are rarely acknowledged. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the cost of renting or buying a home and the reconstruction of urban communities has returned housing as a salient issue across the political spectrum. Moreover, the value of the built legacy of the mid-twentieth century is highly disputed. In a grim twist of fate, the tower block of sixties vintage has

[26] Emily Robinson, *History, heritage and tradition in contemporary British politics: Past, politics and present histories* (Manchester, 2012), 27-28.

assumed the place of the Victorian workers' cottage – defined as a space of poor public health, stymied aspiration and aesthetic blight. Paying attention to the influence of the past on the present shape of the urban environment – whether in the belief that people should own their own home, or that the Georgian villa represents the pinnacle of architectural development – will enable a more fruitful approach to the controversies of the age.

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