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Family, Nation, Empire: An Imperial History of Public Housing in Britain, 1890-2017

By

Claire Patricia Wrigley

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor James Vernon, Chair

Professor Caitlin Rosenthal

Professor Ian Duncan

Professor Jordanna Bailkin

Summer 2024

Abstract

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Public (council) housing law and policy in Britain have been intimately bound up with the rise and fall of its empire and changing political economy. Since its inception in the late nineteenth century, council housing law and policy have been profoundly influenced by racialized and gendered ideals derived from Britain's imperial experience. Created to produce a 'fit imperial race' in the late nineteenth century, council houses were to promote the social reproduction of white Britons and to prevent racial degeneration. As Britain struggled to hold its empire in the interwar years, policy-makers returned to public housing as a means to rebuild that 'imperial race', but residents, newly-enfranchised and fresh from the battlefield, used the new languages of social democracy to insist on their right to a private life. As Britain confronted the loss of its empire in the years after the Second World War, the great expansion of council housing was designed for those meant to restore Britain's power and prestige, the English working man and his family, offering them, for the first time, full equality within the British nation. Migrants from former colonies, single mothers, and others who did not conform were excluded. As these groups organized and pressed for a more inclusive vision of what council housing could be and do, popular support eroded and privatization began. After mass privatization commenced in 1980, those council tenants who could afford to buy their homes gained entry into a financialized 'property-owning democracy'; those who could not were consigned to a marginalized sub-class, quite literally described, as their Victorian forebears had been before them, as an 'underclass'. The 2017 fire at Grenfell Tower, which killed seventy-two people and left over two hundred homeless, the majority of whom were council tenants of colour, was the result of this history.

For the people of Grenfell Tower.

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I have been so lucky. I have felt lucky every single day that I was able to study and work at the University of California, Berkeley. I have been proud to be a member of an institution that brings together people from around the world, all walks of life, with interests in anything that could possibly be imagined. It has been a privilege to be a part of this university.

In particular, of course, Berkeley provided the institutional structure for me to write my dissertation. The four professors of my committee, James Vernon, Caitlin Rosenthal, Ian Duncan, and Jordanna Bailkin have all played their roles to perfection, and I admire every one of them as examples of the best of scholarship, teaching, and mentorship that university life can offer.

First, James. James Vernon has been thanked many times, but never enough. Both professionally and personally James has been generous, sympathetic, caring and compassionate. He taught me that history can, indeed must, have stakes that matter and that devising a meaningful question – why – is the most important thing a historian can do. No one has had a greater influence on the way I think, even though how he did this is still something of a mystery to me, because his guidance was delivered with a marvellously light touch. Nevertheless, as I look back on the dissertation, I can see how much of it comes from what I have learned from him

If James was gloomy about the state of the field, the job market or the world (as only he can be), Caitlin Rosenthal was the opposite. As well as being a brilliant scholar who pushed me to think harder and do better in everything, she has been unfailingly optimistic and cheerful, believing in me and my work, confident that I could do whatever I was attempting, the very definition of a role model. It has been a joy getting to know her and her family and I am so very grateful to her for everything she has done for me.

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When writing this I realised that what I really need to thank my father for is not his excellent memory that I was lucky enough to inherit (though I do!) but his rarely-spoken, yet unshakeable and lifelong, conviction that I can do anything I set my mind to. No one takes people as they are like he does; no one has such an expansive view of the world, or such faith in human capacity in general, and mine in particular, as he does. He put me on the path to Berkeley.

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Mostly I want to say that my dissertation is better because she was here and worse because she is not here. The writing is worse than it would have been, and so are the arguments, because only she loved me enough to let me *keep talking* about council housing *and* would never let me get away with a silly argument or a lazy formulation. I know that Mummy would by no means have agreed with everything that I've written and the loss of an interlocutor as sharp, intelligent, dogged, and perceptive as she has been very hard.

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I dedicate this dissertation to the people of Grenfell Tower. It was remembering how angry that tragedy made me that let me believe that I had something important to say. It was that belief, in turn, that allowed me to finish the dissertation, forgive myself for leaving, and to think that the sacrifices I made to write this dissertation, as well as the privilege it has been to do so, were worth it.

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List of Abbreviations

BHAG	Bengali Housing Action Group
CHAC	Central Housing Advisory Committee
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
GLC	Greater London Council
HAA	Housing Action Area
LCC	London County Council
LCSS	London Council of Social Services
PEP	Institute of Political and Economic Planning
SHAC	Scottish Housing Advisory Committee

Archives & References

BGI	Bishopsgate Institute
BHM	Library of Birmingham
BL	British Library
GPI	George Padmore Institute
HFA	Hammersmith & Fulham Local Studies and Archives
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IRR	Institute of Race Relations
LAM	Lambeth Archives
LEI	Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LRO	Liverpool Records Office
MAN	Manchester Central Library
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MRC	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick
PLY	Plymouth Archives and Local Studies
THM	Tower Hamlets Local History and Library Archives
TNA	The National Archives
WELL	Wellcome Library
WHS	Wandsworth Heritage Service

Introduction

Shah Ahmed, former resident of Flat 156 on the eighteenth floor of Grenfell Tower, Lancaster West Estate in London's north Kensington described the moment he realised his building was on fire. It was shortly after one AM on the fourteenth of June, 2017, and he and his wife, Sayeda, had been woken by the smoke alarms in their flat. Shah Ahmed went into the kitchen, looked out the window and saw "a big fireball coming up from the outside of the building. It was the colour of a burning sunset." The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report continues, paraphrasing Ahmed, "The kitchen window then 'exploded inwards.' Shah Ahmed dialled 999. He did not speak to anyone but threw the handset down and left the flat."¹ Seventy-two people were killed by the Grenfell Tower fire and all two hundred and twenty residents lost their homes. Most of the victims were members of the twenty-first-century working class, working as waiters, retail workers, painters, taxi drivers, truck drivers, porters, cooks and housekeepers. Again and again in their commemorations for the deceased family members insisted that their loved ones were hardworking, respectable members of society who supported their families and took pride in their children doing well at school and graduating from university. Many residents were former refugees, migrants, or the children of migrants who had come to Britain to escape poverty or upheaval in their homelands. Grenfell became home for people with roots in Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, the Gambia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Colombia, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad.²

The cosmopolitan nature of the residents of the council homes in Grenfell Tower is mirrored, somewhat crazily, by the cosmopolitan composition of the part of west London immediately south of Grenfell Tower and the Lancaster West Estate. Holland Park is the playground of the world's wealthiest oligarchs; it is one of the pieces of London dubbed 'Moscow-on-Thames' for the sheer number of Russian billionaires parking their money in its real estate and using it as a base to enjoy London life, and it is home, too, to the likes of globe-trotting businessman Richard Branson and world-famous celebrities David and Victoria Beckham. It goes without saying that Holland Park is one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in the world. Behind the gleaming Bentleys and Rolls Royces, the mansions, and the beautiful, quiet, tree-lined streets of Holland Park, the charred hulk of Grenfell Tower is still visible. Now covered in white protective wrapping and the green heart that has become

I am grateful to my colleagues in the Berkeley Empirical Legal Studies seminar for their incisive comments on an earlier draft of this introduction and to my discussant, Yael Plitmann, for her exceptionally thoughtful criticism.

¹ Shah Ahmed first witness statement [IWS00000388] pp. 1, 10; quoted in Martin Moore-Bick, chair, Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Report, Volume II. HC 49-II, October 2019, paragraph 10.249, 149.

² See the commemorations for the victims given at the start of the Inquiry: Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 21 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-21-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 10, 2023; Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 22 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-22-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 11, 2023; Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 23 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-23-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 11, 2023; Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 24 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-24-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 11, 2023; Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 25 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-25-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 11, 2023; Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 29 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-29-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 11, 2023; Transcript of Commemoration Hearing 30 May 2018 < <https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/documents/transcript/Transcript-of-Commemoration-Hearing-30-May-2018.pdf>>, accessed September 11, 2023.

the emblem of the survivors, the tower and the name have become symbols of the inequality, neglect, and enduring divisions of class and race that plague modern Britain.

Grenfell has become that symbol because those divisions are especially sharp for those who live in the dwindling supply of public – called council – housing. From once making up almost a third of households in Britain (31%), council tenants are now less than a fifth (18%) of households in the United Kingdom; the place of council housing in British life has shrunk so much that the term ‘council house’ or ‘council flat’ feels slightly quaint.³ Today the preferred official term is ‘social housing’ and the majority of tenants in the social sector do *not* live in council housing proper but in housing provided by charities and not-for-profit entities known as housing associations.⁴ The Grenfell residents were a distinct population, unusual not only because of the sheer diversity of their origins but also because despite some owner-occupiers in the building the “vast majority” of them were council tenants.⁵

Yet this broad shift in household tenure is quite recent: the peak of 31% of households in council housing came in 1981, only a year after the first large-scale privatization legislation was passed.⁶ After council housing was privatized, with sitting tenants gaining the ‘right to buy’ in 1980, the population of council tenants plunged.⁷ As their numbers fell, the people living in the ‘social sector’ grew poorer and more marginalised relative to the general population.⁸ Today, residents of social housing, both council and non-profit, are disproportionately likely to be poor, disabled, chronically unemployed, to have experienced homelessness, and to be living in areas of concentrated disadvantage.⁹ Britons of colour are

³ For the sense of nostalgia see e.g. Sadiq Khan, “Growing up in council housing gave me the best start...more children deserve the same,” *Daily Mirror* 3 May 2023, < <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/growing-up-council-house-gave-29871963> >, accessed July 25, 2023; “Security, freedom – and an inside loo: 100 years of council housing,” *The Guardian* 20 October 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2019/oct/20/security-freedom-inside-loo-10-years-council-housing>, accessed July 25, 2023; David Almond, “I grew up in a council estate full of life and optimism – we need to give that back to our young people,” *iNews* 17 January 2020 <<https://inews.co.uk/opinion/i-grew-up-in-a-council-estate-full-of-optimism-children-nowadays-need-that-too-386957>>, accessed July 25, 2023.

⁴ In England of the 17% of households in the social sector, 7% are in council housing; 10% are in housing association housing. In Scotland the split is more even; half of the tenants in the social sector live in council housing, half in housing association housing. The most recent statistics show that 15% of Northern Irish households, 16% of Welsh, 17% of English and 23% of Scottish live in social housing, or a nation-wide average of 18%. See Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2020-21; Statistics for Wales, Statistical First Release: Social Housing Vacancies, Lettings, Arrears, 2020-21; Scottish Government, People, Communities and Places: Social Tenants in Scotland, 2017; Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, English Housing Survey: Social Rented Sector, 2020-21.

⁵ The Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Report, Volume I, HC-49-I, October 2019, paragraph 3.6, 20. It is notable that after acknowledging that they *were* council tenants the four-volume Phase I Report avoids calling the residents of Grenfell ‘council tenants,’ or the flats ‘council flats.’

⁶ English Housing Survey data on tenure trends and cross tenure: Table FT1101 (S101): Trends in Tenure, accessed 29 April 2024 < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64af3084c033c1000d806207/FT1101_Trends_in_tenure_58.ods >

⁷ English Housing Survey data on tenure trends and cross tenure: Table FT1101 (S101): Trends in Tenure, accessed 29 April 2024 < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64af3084c033c1000d806207/FT1101_Trends_in_tenure_58.ods >

⁸ Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatisation of Public Housing* (London: Routledge, 1988), ch. 4.

⁹ Ian Cole and Robert Furbey, *The Eclipse of Council Housing* (London: Routledge, 1994); Colin Jones and Alan Murie, *The Right to Buy: Analysis and Evaluation of a Housing Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Moira Munro, “Evaluating Policy Toward Increasing Owner Occupation,” *Housing Studies* 22, no. 2 (2007): 243-60; Jen Pearce and Jim Vine, “Quantifying residualisation: the changing nature of social housing in the UK,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 29 (2014): 657-75; Reinout Kleinhans and Maarten van Ham,

overrepresented in the social housing sector and suffer those related forms of disadvantage at higher rates than the general population.¹⁰

The transformation of council housing from entirely publicly owned to a patchwork of public and private ownership was a revolution in law, policy, and, whether they purchased their homes or not, all council tenants' lives, and the Grenfell fire has been the most recent and most ghastly manifestation of four decades of marginalization of council tenants after privatization. But the scale and pace of the changes that led to the fire were not unprecedented. Rather, they were the latest in a series of frequent, abrupt, and radical changes that have marked the whole history of council housing.

Council housing was never intended to be a solution *only* to the problem of affordable, habitable housing. In this dissertation I argue that it was also an important tool devised by imperial Britain to keep its place in the world. That is why the law and policy of council housing have been changed so often and so drastically over the previous century. As Britain's place in the world has changed, so too has its housing policy. Council housing was made to be the home of the 'fit imperial race,' the workers and soldiers of the empire, and their wives and mothers. After Britain no longer had an empire council housing became the home of those left out of post-imperial, neoliberal Britain. Situating the Grenfell crisis in a longer history of council housing allows us to see why the disaster occurred and why the victims were who they were.

Argument

Council housing was born of imperial crisis. The 'Housing Question,' as it arose at the end of the nineteenth century was overtly racialized and so the politics, law and policy of council housing were yoked from the start to the question of what Britain's imperial power was and how it could be maintained. Britain was a mature industrial economy with a mass urban working class and possessed the largest empire in the world. In this capacity it exported finished goods, capital, settlers, soldiers, children, language, culture, educational methods, law and political systems to the world. But from the 1880s on the empire's ruling elite were gripped by a panic that the urban working classes were not physically and mentally fit enough to defend the empire, should it come to that. Instead, the working classes were seen to be at risk of physical and moral degeneracy; too many of them were judged to live their lives according to moral codes at odds with the 'muscular Christianity' of the upper middle classes who ruled Britain and its empire.¹¹ Most of all, there was a sense that at least one or two generations had now grown up in filthy slums that were falling into greater dereliction every day. London's courts, Birmingham's back-to-backs, and Glasgow's tenements were breeding Britons who were almost as sickly and as strange as the 'natives' of Africa, Australasia, and

"Lessons Learned from the Largest Tenure-Mix Operation in the World: Right to Buy in the United Kingdom," *Cityscape* 15 no. 2 (2013): 102-118.

¹⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, "Households renting social housing by ethnicity and area," accessed 23 June 2024, < <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/social-housing/renting-from-a-local-authority-or-housing-association-social-housing/latest>>; Valerie Karn and Deborah Phillips, "Race and ethnicity in housing," in *Race Relations in Britain* ed. Tessa Blackstone, Bikhu Parekh and Peter Sanders (London: Routledge, 1998), 128-57; Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report* (London: Profile Books, 2000); Deborah Phillips and Malcolm Harrison, "Constructing an Integrated Society: Lessons for Tackling Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Segregation in Britain," *Housing Studies* 25, no. 2 (2010): 221-35; Harris Beider, *Race, Housing and Community: Perspectives on Policy and Practice* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2011). Steve Garner and Gargi Bhattacharya, "Poverty, ethnicity and place," JRF Programme Paper, (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2011); Sanna Markannen and Malcolm Harrison, "'Race', Deprivation and the Research Agenda: Revisiting Housing, Ethnicity, and Neighbourhoods," *Housing Studies* 28 no. 3 (2013): 409-28.

¹¹ On church and empire see Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), especially ch. 3.

India whom Britain claimed to be bringing to civilisation.¹² At the heart of the ‘Housing Question’ was the distinction between a home, with a wholesome, English family inside it, and a slum, dwelling-place of the feeble, foreign, sick and dangerous. Britain’s first true council housing legislation, the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 was enacted to create more of the former and eliminate the latter.

Housing provision of any kind ground to a halt in 1914 with the onset of war, but it returned to the political agenda as soon as the Armistice was declared – literally. Two weeks after the guns fell silent on the Western Front Prime Minister Lloyd George opened his re-election campaign by calling for Britain to be made ‘a fit country for heroes to live in.’¹³ In 1919 his government’s Housing Act mandated slum clearance and estate construction throughout the country and subsidised local authorities for the first time. Housing’s position at the nexus of a set of anxieties over poverty, crime, sexuality, education and culture added up to a serious concern over the ‘governability’ of the metropolitan working classes at a time when they were more important than ever to the imperial project. In 1919 the empire had reached its greatest extent but was in danger of splintering as the labour movement, anticolonial nationalists and others made increasingly radical demands for the reconfiguration of the empire’s politics, economy and society, all in the wake of the collapse of four empires and the Bolshevik Revolution. Questions of when difference should be thought of as deviance, the effects of deviance on the social body and on politics, the use of force, and how aggressively the state could and should interfere in its subjects’ lives in pursuit of racial health, a stable social order, and industrial and imperial supremacy became very sharp.

The origins of council housing as a project of racial health designed to shore up the empire meant that interwar policy-makers continued to envisage slum clearance as a method of enfolding the racially suspect (the weak, the sick, the unemployed) into the imperial project by eliminating dangerous environments. But at the same time, it is in the interwar period that we see how Britons themselves resisted the social roles policy-makers laid out for them. The expansion of council housing into a true national program did for the first time give a sense of the housing project as one for all Britons, particularly as, after 1928, Britain achieved universal adult suffrage. The moderate expansion of council housing and the increase in slum clearance on one hand and the poverty caused by the Great Depression and the stronger demands made by activists and residents on the other forced policy-makers and politicians to consider what housing law dedicated not to the imperial family but to the needy could look like.

As with the First World War, so with the Second. The great expansion of council housing through the 1949 Housing Act, passed by Clement Attlee’s Labour government, was a major part of the social democrats’ promise never to return to the poverty and instability of the interwar years. No longer would poverty, ignorance or ill-health exclude the white working classes from taking up their rightful places as British citizens in an imperial social democracy. But the expansion of council housing was not like the foundation of the National Health Service or the abolition of the last vestiges of the Poor Law with the creation of National Assistance because it did not lose its function as a project of racial health. By leaving council housing on the same legal footing it had rested on for the previous half century in all but two respects (local authorities were now permitted and funded to build homes designed to meet the ‘general needs’ of their districts and they could now rent to anyone, not only members of the working classes) the Housing Act of 1949 reinscribed council housing as the home of white English culture.

¹² William Booth’s *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, its title a deliberate reference to the explorer Henry Morton Stanley’s *In Darkest Africa*, both appeared in 1890.

¹³ “Mr Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times*, November 25, 1918.

The new council homes and estates were designed to mould families into the foundation of a revitalized imperial, industrial democracy. I call this family the ‘English social democrat’ family, imagined as a white heterosexual nuclear family. The father, the breadwinner, would be employed in Britain’s resurgent industrial economy and the whole family would enjoy the rights, benefits and privileges of social democracy from education to consumer goods. In return, they would grow healthy in clean and airy environments, and they would be inducted into the culture of the constituent races of Britain, England, Scotland and Wales, especially England, and the British Commonwealth would emerge stronger, fairer, and better. To serve this expanded role imagined for council housing the knowledge-production apparatus that had been an essential part of council housing grew into a mass operation. Local authorities created extensive selection, allocation, and evaluation criteria so that they could fulfil their statutory duty to house certain people experiencing certain kinds of needs whilst choosing to house, as much as possible, the English social democrat and his family, the acknowledged social, political, and economic foundation of postwar Britain. Commonwealth citizens migrating to Britain from former colonies, single mothers, and others who did not match the stable white nuclear family were largely denied access to council housing.

Yet the expansion of the welfare state, council housing included, could not halt the transformation of Britain through decolonization. With the decline of empire came the loss of industries dependent on imperial resources and markets. Eliminating need and rebuilding Britain as an industrial social democracy also turned out to be unachievable. From the mid-1960s on, a series of sociological studies, collectively credited with the ‘rediscovery of poverty,’ pointed to the existence of an underclass untouched by the rising affluence of society at large.¹⁴ The slums, where the poor and the poorest, as the most famous study had it, lived, were unmissable evidence of the failure of the welfare state to keep its promise to slay the ‘five giants’ and to enable all Britons to enjoy the rights and privileges of citizenship.¹⁵ The slum clearance ‘drives’ that began in 1954 intensified from the mid-1960s in an attempt to remove Britain’s most vulnerable from appalling conditions, but as they did so new complications arose. As Britons who did not match the white nuclear family model refused to accept the abrogation of the equality social democracy promised them by resisting clearances, protesting discriminatory allocations, and squatting in vacant council flats, the compact on which council housing had been reconstituted in 1949 broke down. An intense debate began over how these new residents who were by no means the ideal white heterosexual nuclear family should be managed, which ranged from whether families of colour ought to be forcibly ‘dispersed’ to aid assimilation to how much surveillance residents on ‘problem’ estates should be subjected to. The promise of council housing under social democracy, that it would relieve need and integrate the white working classes into the national and imperial whole on terms of equality and respect, could not be kept when Britain was no longer an imperial or industrial power.

As decolonization and deindustrialization took hold, and Britain gained a reputation as the ‘sick man of Europe,’ it became clear that council housing was no longer needed to produce an imperial race. The association between council housing and the most vulnerable white Britons – the unemployed, the disabled, the elderly and single parents – grew. As it did, Britons of colour were also slowly allowed into council housing because council housing was

¹⁴ Most famously, Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest* (London: Bell, 1965). For contemporary uses of the phrase see e.g. Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debates*, 2nd ed. (Bristol: Policy Press, 2003); Becky Taylor and Ben Rogaly, “‘Mrs Fairly is a Dirty, Lazy Type’: Unsatisfactory Households and the Problem of Problem Families in Norwich 1942-1963,” *Twentieth Century British History* vol. 18, no. 4 (2007): 429-452; Stewart Lansley, *The Richer, The Poorer: How Britain Enriched the Few and Failed the Poor* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2022).

¹⁵ William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, 1942, Cmnd. 6404, 6.

gradually losing fortune and favour. By the mid-1970s council estates were no longer the homes of the stable white working class, employed in leading industries, and council housing's purpose seemed to be gone, leaving poverty and dysfunction in its wake. Neoliberal calls for privatization gained pace. The Housing Act of 1980, passed less than a year after Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives returned to power, gave sitting council tenants the "Right to buy" their homes at substantial discounts.

Privatization claimed to solve two problems at a stroke. It distinguished between the 'good' or 'successful' tenants and the 'bad' or 'problem' tenants, a goal that had been central to the project of housing the working classes since Victorian philanthropic landlords. Then, at a time when the former colonial subjects of Britain were insisting on their rights and resisting the discrimination meted out to them, privatization and the property-owning democracy also offered an official, colour-blind solution to the problems of discrimination and inequality. Tenants of colour could buy their houses on the same terms as their white neighbours, and, unlike application and allocation procedures, right-to-buy was centrally controlled so there was no regional variation. 'Respectable' tenants could now enter a financialized 'property-owning democracy.' Those who could not found themselves marginalized, quite literally referred to, as their Victorian forebears had been before them, as an underclass.¹⁶

Citizenship was for sale, and not everyone could afford to pay. The discrimination baked into allocation and management procedures since 1949 made certain tenants both unwilling and unable to buy their homes. These tenants were far more likely to be elderly, Britons of colour, or single parents. Ultimately privatization sank council housing further into disfavour and continued its evolution into a space legally distinct from the rest of Britain. It had always been a place where landlords were allowed greater access to, and control over, their tenants' lives than their counterparts in the private sector, but over time the gap widened. By 1980 the rights and obligations of municipal landlords and council tenants had diverged sharply from their counterparts in the private sector and right-to-buy twisted them still further.

When tenants were buyers, councils were stripped of any rights private vendors enjoyed, including proceeds from sales; but they gained still more power over their remaining tenants. Securing the property of Britain's property-owners grew in importance in neoliberal Britain, so policing and surveilling the propertyless became a feature of legal and cultural life.¹⁷ The Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 created the Anti-Social Behaviour Order ('asbo'); the reality show *ASBO Teen to Beauty Queen* aired on Channel 5; and even the *New York Times* sent a reporter to write a feature on "this endless housing project," the great Wythenshawe estate outside Manchester in 2007.¹⁸ Exactly three months before the fire the Grenfell Action Group wrote on their blog, "[we] are acutely aware that we are resented and despised by the unholy trinity that controls North Kensington, ie the Council and their quislings at the KCTMO and the Westway Trust."¹⁹ The marginalisation and resentment that the Grenfell residents felt and the consequences they have suffered because of it is the all-too-real manifestation of a century's worth of imperial housing politics.

¹⁶ John Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded Since 1880*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

¹⁷ Stuart Hall et. al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

¹⁸ Sarah Lyall, "How the Young Poor Measure Poverty in Britain: Drink, Drugs and Their Time in Jail," *New York Times* March 10, 2007 < <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/10/world/europe/10britain.html>>.

¹⁹ Grenfell Action Group, "KCTMO – Feeling the Heat!" Blog post, March 14, 2017, accessed August 23, 2023 < <https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/03/14/kctmo-feeling-the-heat/>>.

Methodology and Archives

Debates over the Housing Question, the Housing Problem, and the Housing Crisis, as it has been variously known over the last century, have left historians with a considerable archive. The politicians of Westminster, the civil servants of Whitehall, the sociologists, demographers, economists, doctors, epidemiologists, health visitors, district nurses, and social workers of the island's institutes and universities, and the local councils tasked with dealing with housing left behind a mass of documentation. In the research that they undertook and consumed, the debates they held, the choices they made when writing housing law and putting it into practice, the people who exercised formal power over council housing – from employees of local councils and charity workers to the Minister of Housing – revealed their preoccupations and priorities, their understanding of what it meant to be British, what Britain's role in the world should be, and what were appropriate and attainable uses of state power. Those who exercise *informal* power over council housing, notably residents and the press, provide the counterpoint to the official interpretation of the work that council housing was meant to do as they constructed and deconstructed the politics of housing for over a century. I trace these formal and informal domains of housing law and policy through deep research at over twenty archives around Britain, ranging from the largest, the National Archives, to local libraries and the personal papers of activists and scholars.²⁰

The connection between the law, the family, and the empire is the thread that runs through the history of council housing. I argue that the influence and effects of empire, that postcolonial historians of law have documented in the colonies, were no less important in the law of the metropole. No less in the metropole than the colonies did Britain devise political and ideological instruments to shore up imperial power. No less in metropole than the colonies were law, policy, and the practice of governance indispensable tools of that power. Scholars have shown that colonial law was intensely situational, bending according to the judgements of colonial officials, it was also often based on, and described, a reality willed by the colonisers, not one responsive to existing customs or practice.²¹ This is, I argue, how the law of council housing functioned as well. In the colonies this attitude to law could and did lead to violence but its mechanism – how it worked – was the classification and categorisation of colonial subjects, the segregation of public and private spaces, and the regulation of behaviours within them. Scholars have further shown that the hierarchies of racial and sexual difference that were so crucial to British imperial rule were managed through a distinctive body of law. From the Caribbean to Southeast Asia, historians have identified a pattern of British colonial rulers developing a body of law governing marriage, inheritance, and prostitution with the goal of grafting a particular racialized, gendered and classed social order onto subjects' everyday lives.²²

²⁰ My thanks to the London Metropolitan Archives and the estate of Pansey Jeffrey; to the Library of Birmingham and the Sparkbrook Association; and to the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and Valerie Marett.

²¹ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963. 1981. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); R. W. Kostal, *A Jurisprudence of Power: Victorian Empire and the Rule of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: the British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Lisa Ford, *The King's Peace: Law and Order in the British Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).

²² Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood." *History Workshop* no. 5 (Spring 1978): 9-65; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Tanika Sarkar, "A Prehistory of Rights: The Age of Consent Debate in Colonial Bengal." *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 601-622; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination*,

In the metropole the state did not intervene as forcefully in its subjects' daily lives as it could in the colonies. Yet the statute law that governs council housing grants strong, and unique, powers over the lives of people who fell within its ambit. The makers of housing law developed mechanisms, tests, and standards that dictated the spaces families lived in, mandated who counted as part of a family and who did not, where people could eat and sleep, what occupations different members of the household could perform, and what council tenants could put in their wills. Like colonial law, the law of council housing was written to produce a social order (classed, gendered, raced) most conducive to maintaining the British. In a manner analogous to the cantonment and the lock hospital, emblematic spaces of colonial power, council estates and districts classed as slums became spaces distinct in law from the rest of Britain.²³ The privacy of a family living in a slum or in a council house was always in question because the law of council housing was written so that people could be, and were, scrutinised according to where and how they fitted into the imperial project.²⁴

This is mostly a top-down story of council housing, but not one told from the very top. It is a narrative of 'visions' articulated by politicians and of 'work' done by civil servants in service, or not, of those visions. It is not a story that seeks familiarity with the quotidian realities of being a council tenant. Instead, I follow the development of a particular branch of what political scientist Michael Lipsky has termed 'street-level bureaucracy': the public servants – teachers, police officers, social workers, health workers, public housing managers – who interact directly with the public.²⁵ Council housing is one of the domains of social life where, as Lipsky puts it, those responsible for developing and implementing its law and policy hold "the keys to a dimension of citizenship," because they "mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state."²⁶

Working with the papers of politicians, policy-makers, journalists, academics, local councillors, and activists enables me to tell a history of the changing work that council housing was imagined to do for the British polity. Describing the series of visions of Britain offered by the law of council housing and the attempts of different parts of the British state to bring them to life required thinking about boundaries, about birthplaces, about rates and taxes, and about what being British meant. A story of council housing told across the whole of Britain quickly became a story of the formation of the British state as we know it today. Reading sources made in London for the vision of Britain they offer and seeing what happened to it when the local authorities in Plymouth, Rhyl, or Cumbernauld, carried out their duties, we see how council housing exemplifies the messy and contested process of state formation, of the virtues and vices of localization, and of how imperial or regional politics are localized and vice versa.

Considering the role that council housing played in state formation at the end of empire offers a new perspective on contemporary British politics. Today, debates over social

1830-1867 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (2002. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Rachel Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law, and Women's Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Julia Stephens, *Governing Islam: Law, Empire, and Secularism in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²³ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890-1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

²⁴ Jacques Donzelot theorized the family as a site of social reproduction and therefore a target of interest and control by the state in *The Policing of Families* trans. Robert Hurley (1977. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

²⁵ Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy, 30th Anniversary Edition: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), 3. With thanks to Catherine Albiston for the suggestion.

²⁶ Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, 4, ch. 1.

housing in Britain are frequently a slippery slope to, if not a Trojan horse for, discussions of the most divisive issues in contemporary politics (immigration, inequality, social care, sustainable economic growth).²⁷ As the only recent work offering a *longue-durée* history of council housing, my dissertation uncovers hitherto unsuspected or unelaborated links and continuities from council housing's early days until well into the twentieth century.²⁸ I use those links to argue for the deep imbrication of imperial political economy in domestic social policy, and accordingly my research has been focused on the cities with the longest history of slum clearance and council housing (London, Liverpool and Birmingham). Only these largest cities have material from the whole of the period I cover because it was not until the Local Government Acts of 1972 (England and Wales) and 1973 (Scotland) that local authorities were obliged to keep records and make them available for public inspection.²⁹ Bringing together a wide range of sources from a diversity of archives, from north, south, east and west, from the beginnings of council housing to the present, offers a thorough grounding in a century's worth of council housing politics. Neither council estates nor their inhabitants are *sui generis* features of British towns and cities; British culture, or British law, nor are they settled or uncontested. Telling a long, Britain-wide story of council housing highlights how the housing politics of modern Britain have been constructed over the preceding century.

Historiography

While the dissertation touches many questions, I intervene primarily in three interrelated strands of modern British historiography: the specialised historiography of the law, policy, and culture of council housing; the debate over the rise and fall of the welfare state; and more recent work covering Britain's transition from liberal empire to neoliberal nation-state. I also draw on the emerging body of work exploring the rise of neoliberalism and its connections to urban development, suburbanism, consumer culture, class formation, race relations and feminism. To date, however, historians pursuing those questions have focused almost exclusively on the United States, so this dissertation is an early attempt to think with those questions outside the American context.³⁰

The specialised domain of the history of council housing falls into two camps. In the first, urban historians, economic historians and historians of policy have constructed detailed histories of particular policies, particular places, or particular eras.³¹ The two leading scholars

²⁷ See e.g. Richard Littlejohn, "Awkward questions no one will answer about Grenfell Tower," *Daily Mail* 7 July 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-4673612/Awkward-questions-no-one-answer-Grenfell-Tower.html> accessed 3 July, 2023.

²⁸ *Longue-durée* histories of council housing largely stopped appearing after the mid-1980s. Stephen Merrett, *State Housing in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1979); Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing in England, 1815-1985* 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1986).

²⁹ Local Government Act (England and Wales) 1972 c. 70 ss. 224-229; Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 c. 65 s. 200. See "Local government acts," TNA, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/legislation/other-archival-legislation/local-government-acts/#:~:text=Local%20Government%20Act%201972&text=The%20guidance%20includes%20sections%20on,by%20an%20established%20archive%20service> accessed June 28, 2023 and "Guidance on 'proper arrangements' for archives," archived from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (now Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) by TNA <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/+http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/360902/constitutionsandethics/constitutionalarrangements/guidanceproper/> accessed June 28, 2023.

³⁰ Exceptions include Aled Davies, Ben Jackson and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (eds.) *A Neoliberal Age? Britain Since the 1970s* (London: UCL Press, 2021); James Vernon, "Heathrow and the Making of Neoliberal Britain," *Past and Present* 252, no. 1 (2021): 213-47; Tehila Sasson, *The Solidarity Economy: Nonprofits and the Making of Neoliberalism after Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

³¹ The main histories of council housing are: Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*; Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heinemann Educational

of housing law, Mark Swenarton and Martin Daunton, show that the idea of stabilising the housing market, narrowly, and society itself, more broadly, through estate construction and slum clearance, carried out by local authorities and supported and guided by the central government, was the only solution that was conceptually available, politically viable, and financially possible for much of council housing's pre-1949 history.³² While it may be true, this explanation does not explain *why* housing politics were discussed in the terms they were *or* why housing politics were driven by such an intense interest in the families and family structures themselves. These specialised histories of housing policy explain the constraints that policymakers were operating under, but they do not explain why housing became and remained the political fault line that it is.

The other branch of council housing history has concentrated on its cultural history.³³ It, too, has remained largely detached from the mainstream of the historiography of modern Britain, so there is little historical consideration of how the demographics (class backgrounds, balance of the sexes, ethnic makeup) have changed over time, particularly as almost no histories begin before 1945. Those questions have mostly been pursued by sociologists and economists, and the mass of evidence they have accumulated from the 1930s on speaks to the great diversity of experience of council housing.³⁴ In the historiography, though, that diversity is lost. Their generally short timeframe and their distance from mainstream British historiography mean that cultural histories of council housing have, to date, tended to reproduce uncritically the experiences of just that group, the stable, white, heterosexual nuclear family, for whom council housing was made.³⁵ However, the prolonged housing crisis Britain has been facing has resulted in a growing number of scholars returning to the history of housing with new questions.³⁶ As more and more work chronicling the distinctive culture

Books, 1981); M. J. Daunton (ed.) *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984); Peter Malpass, *Housing and the Welfare State: The Development of Housing Policy in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Other work concentrating on the postwar period only include Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Peter Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Shabna Begum, *From Sylhet to Spitalfields: Bengali Squatters in 1970s East London* (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2023).

³² Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes*; Daunton, introduction to *Councillors and Tenants*.

³³ Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001); Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta, 2007); John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London: Verso, 2018) and *A History of Council Housing in 100 Estates* (London: RIBA, 2023); Dan Bulley, Jenny Edkins and Nadine El-Enany (eds.) *After Grenfell: Violence, Resistance and Response* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

³⁴ See e.g. Susan J. Smith, *The Politics of 'Race' and Residence: Citizenship, Segregation and White Supremacy in Britain* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); Deborah Phillips and Malcolm Harrison, "Constructing an Integrated Society: Lessons for Tackling Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Segregation in Britain," *Housing Studies* 25, no. 2 (2010): 221-235; Paul Milbourne, "The Geographies of Poverty and Welfare," *Geography Compass* 4, no. 2 (2010): 158-171; James Rhodes and Laurence Brown, "The Rise and Fall of the 'inner city': Race, Space and Urban Policy in Postwar England," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 17 (2018): 3243-59. For historical data see chs. 2 and 4.

³⁵ See e.g. John Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*. An exception is Becky Tunstall, *The Fall and Rise of Social Housing: 100 Years on 20 Estates* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), which builds on an earlier study she completed for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Anne Power and Rebecca Tunstall, *Swimming Against the Tide: Polarisation or Progress on 20 Unpopular Council Estates, 1980-1995* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995) but Tunstall is not a historian by training and her analysis is highly sociological and does not offer an integrated argument for historical change.

³⁶ Alistair Cartwright, "Landlordism on Trial: Rent Tribunals and Resistance in Post-War London, 1946-64," *Twentieth Century British History* 33, no. 4 (2022): 593-621; Holly Smith, "The Ronan Point Scandal: Architecture, Crisis, and Possibility in British Social Democracy, 1968-93," *Twentieth Century British History*

and spaces of council housing is being published, so the need to understand what made it distinctive from without, as I aim to do, as well as within, grows. Neither social and cultural histories of one estate, or one city, or policy histories told from Whitehall alone can fully explain the unique place of council housing in social, cultural, economic and political life.

By contrast, the historiography of the British welfare state, its built environment, and its relationship to British social democracy and neoliberalism (both fraught terms) is vibrant. A cadre of historians have surveyed the politics of the built environment in postwar Britain, showing that a distinct postwar politics of space and development grew for and, later, against Britain's experiments in redistributive political economy and its switch to neoliberalism (or 'market liberalism' as some call it).³⁷ At the same time, historians on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to grapple with the legacy of empire and to ask how and why social policy, so concerned with normative class and gender roles, might have been shaped by race, empire, and decolonization too.³⁸ Jordanna Bailkin in particular has given a careful and sensitive account of the ways in which postwar welfare policies were not only derived and administered by men and women with imperial experience, but worked to exclude and marginalise migrants legally entitled to the benefits of the new welfare state. These scholars have shown that social policy is a rich field in which to analyse the great changes undergone by modern Britain. Their work is complemented by the large and growing body of work by historians investigating where imperial politics and modes of thinking were important or persistent in the metropole and how the end of empire complicated and reshaped ideas of Britishness, of citizenship, and of equality.³⁹

The history of council housing I provide here unifies these three strands of historiography. I extend existing lines of inquiry into *how* imperial politics influenced metropolitan law and policy, as housing politics show us *why* imperial influence has appeared in particular guises at particular times. Housing is, further, unique among social welfare policies and programs because it involves the whole family all at once, and encompasses all aspects of daily life (health, education, employment, consumption, leisure), in ways that other forms of social policy do not. Lastly, the specialization of work on council housing has left wider British historiography lacking an explanation of why council housing took the form that it did, why it is such a unique body of statutory law, or why the population living in council housing has become so distinct, in terms of socio-economic status, in terms of race

34, no. 4 (2023): 805-34; Rob Waters, "Respectability and Race between the Suburb and the City: An Argument about the Making of 'Inner-City' London," *Urban History* 50, no. 2 (2023): 214-31.

³⁷ James Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity: Space, Power and Governance in Mid-Twentieth Century British Cities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Otto Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities: Architect-Planners and the Politics of Radical Urban Renewal in 1960s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Sam Wetherell (*Foundations: How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) and "Sowing Seeds: Garden Festivals and the Remaking of British Cities after Deindustrialization," *Journal of British Studies* 61, no. 1 (2022): 83-104; Divya Subramanian, "The Townscape Movement and the Politics of Post-War Urbanism," *Twentieth Century British History* 32, no. 3 (2021): 392-415.

³⁸ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Ellen Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Robbie Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018).

³⁹ Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race,' and National Identity, 1945-64* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (1998. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1945-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Kieran Connell, *Black Handsworth: Race in 1980s Britain* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

and ethnicity, and in terms of gender and family structure, from the general population of Great Britain.

In providing a unifying argument, I am drawing on new work in the history of twentieth-century American capitalism, a body of work which has not been replicated in the British context. For the United States, however, we have a rich literature on urban development, political economy, and gender, class and race. Lizabeth Cohen and Bethany Moreton offered syntheses of the political economy of postwar urban development and consumerism to trace important changes in the politics of gender, class and race; while Elizabeth Tandy Shermer and N. D. B. Connolly focus tightly on the history of capitalism as told through urban redevelopment, and governance.⁴⁰ These and other histories, including Melinda Cooper's *Family Values* (2017) and Marcia Chatelain's *Franchise* (2020), the history of MacDonalds and 'black capitalism' provide models of how the modern historian can bring together local and national politics and political economy without losing sight of the individual people at the heart of the story.⁴¹ In that vein, this dissertation is therefore an intervention into the specialised history of council housing, into histories of the welfare state, and into histories of imperial and post-imperial political thought. These three things should be thought of together, since they made one another.

Outline of chapters

This dissertation tells the story of the rise and fall of council housing over the long twentieth century, from the 'slum crisis' of the 1880s to the Grenfell fire of 2017. Council housing was and is a unique body of law, formed from the imperatives of Britain's imperial political economy to produce the white working-class family deemed necessary to uphold imperial power. In this dissertation, I trace how the law and policy, and the very homes themselves changed over time, as the state attempted different ways to manage the families within them. As Britain's empire disintegrated, so too did council housing, and the residents who remained were left vulnerable in post-imperial, neoliberal Britain.

Chapter One charts the emergence of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 and its early operation, after more than a decade of concern over Britain's expanding slums. Chapter Two investigates the 'Homes for Heroes' program inaugurated by Lloyd George's government in 1919 and its successor, the first sustained, national campaign of slum clearance undertaken by the National Labour government from 1930 until the outbreak of the Second World War. The third chapter turns to the expansion, again, of council housing, beginning under Labour in 1949, as Britain's social democrats envisioned council housing at the centre of their great project of integration and equality, but only for the stable, white, heterosexual nuclear family. Chapter Four interrogates the famous 'rediscovery of poverty' of the mid-1960s and examines the consequences when people who were dramatically unlike the family for whom council housing had been built – families of colour, single mothers, the elderly and chronically ill – moved into council housing. The Epilogue and Conclusion explores why privatization was the solution chosen to the crisis of council housing in the 1970s, then turns to the life of council housing after privatization, taking the story up to Grenfell and offering directions for future research.

⁴⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017); Marcia Chatelain, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

Chapter One

Model Dwellings, Model People: High-Imperial Britain and the Birth of Council Housing, 1880-1914

Introduction

The First Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes, presented in 1885, was over a thousand pages long.¹ No less weighty than the report was the Commission that had made it, chaired by prominent Liberal MP Sir Charles Dilke. Dilke was known for his recent success in steering franchise and electoral reforms through Parliament and for his popular travelogue, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries* (1869), in which he celebrated the rise of Anglo settler colonies and entertained visions of a global imperial federation 'dominated' by the "Anglo-Saxon" race.² His fellow Commissioners were also a constellation of late-Victorian Britain's most well-known politicians, Liberal and Conservative, aristocrats, and social reformers, including the Prince of Wales, the Cardinal of Westminster, and the Marquis of Salisbury. This august group of men collated evidence over eight months of hearings and concluded that the "evil" of overcrowding was endemic in London and bad in many provincial towns; that structural and sanitary conditions of the houses of the urban poor were frightful; and that the effect of these conditions on the inhabitants of these dwelling-places were "physically and morally beyond description."³ Since the terms of their commission did not limit them to one part of the United Kingdom, the Commissioners followed up their First Report, on England and Wales, with a Second, on Scotland, and a Third, on Ireland.⁴

The Royal Commission marks the start of a sea-change in how the United Kingdom's political class thought about housing, the working classes, the four nations, and the empire. For the previous century observers had decried the slums and stews of Britain's growing cities as hotbeds of crime and immorality.⁵ As late 1875 Joseph Chamberlain, then Liberal mayor of Birmingham had asked his aldermen, "if the members...had grown up in the same way" as the inhabitants of their city's slums, "did any one of them believe he should have escaped the gaol or the hangman?"⁶ A decade later, however, a new note sounded in the debate. In 1887 the Conservative Lord Brabazon declared that the "unhealthy conditions of urban life" meant that "large numbers of the inhabitants of our cities are physically unfitted, though in prime of life, to defend the country in time of war, or to carry on her work in time

¹ Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, *First Report*, 1885, C. 4402, vols. I-III.

² David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister: A Life of Sir Charles Dilke* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), 137-38; Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries During 1866-7* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869). See also Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³ Royal Commission, C. 4402, 7-8, 9-11, 13.

⁴ Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, *Second Report: Scotland*, 1885, C. 4409; *Third Report: Ireland*, 1885, C. 4547.

⁵ William Hogarth, *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street*, 1751, etching and engraving, 15 1/16 x 12 1/2 in (38.3 x 31.7 cm), and etching and engraving, 16 9/16 x 13 9/16 in (39 x 32.5 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/399847> and <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/399845>; Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 579-85; Poor Law Commissioners, *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1842); Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Philip Horne, (1837-38; London: Penguin, 2002), *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (1853; 1996. London: Penguin, 2003). Gustave Doré's illustrations to *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, and various other popular works also achieved wide circulation. See *Dore's London* ed. Valerie Purton (London: Arcturus, 2008).

⁶ "The Birmingham Improvement Scheme: Address by the Mayor of Birmingham, Mr. Alderman Chamberlain," *British Architect* 4, no. 95 (1875): 226.

of peace,” leading to “a growing...danger [of]...a degeneration of the race and...national effacement.”⁷

The contrast between Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Brabazon’s comments exemplifies the shift the debate over the housing of the working classes over the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As Britain faced increasing industrial and military competition abroad and labour militancy at home longstanding concerns over the slums breeding immorality and crime merged with newer fears of the physical and mental degeneration of the ‘British race.’ Bad housing came to be seen as both a harbinger and a hastener of the physical and mental decline of British race and thus of the British empire. Politicians, philanthropists, and social reformers of all kinds, from journalists to clergymen, had long advocated better housing for the working classes as a means of fixing dysfunctional families, teaching the urban masses to be moral, thrifty, responsible, continent, and loyal. But growing concerns with the physical and mental fitness, or lack thereof of the working classes, sharpened the focus of observers on the home as the nursery of the workers who powered British industry, the soldiers who defended the Empire, and the mothers who nurtured them all.

The problem of slums, immorality, racial degeneration, morbidity and crime grew into one of those great nineteenth-century intellectual exercises, a question, in this case the Housing Question. As Holly Case has argued, questions were developed around a present-day problem that begged a solution: by posing a particular question and a particular solution, the questioner (*querist*) would “stake out the terrain of the future,” both by outlining the positive consequences that would flow from their preferred solution, and the negative ones (“common threats were violence, civic unrest, and war”).⁸ The Housing Question grew into an entry-point into discussions about the future of the British race and the British empire because it allowed the political class to examine and comment on a range of intersecting issues of race, class, and gender besetting the late-Victorian empire. The slum crisis “seething in the very centre of our great cities” was a frame that allowed discussion to move from the most intimate domestic metropolitan space – the home – to the widest imperial frame, civilization itself.⁹ As *Britain’s Homes: A Study of the Empire’s Heart-Disease*, a treatise published in 1902 intoned, “Without healthy houses, we are told, there can be no family; without family there can be no morality; without morality there can be no men; without men there can be no Empire.”¹⁰ By setting up and approaching the Housing Question in this way, the late-Victorian political class was producing, refining, and reflecting on their understandings of British imperial power in the world.

The Housing Question was one of many debates comprising what contemporaries and later scholars have called the Social Question. The Social Question comprised a range of socio-political issues that plagued Britain as it became an urban, industrialized metropole with a true mass culture and mass (though not universal) suffrage.¹¹ As various studies have

⁷ Brabazon, “Decay of Bodily Strength in Towns,” *The Nineteenth Century* 123 (1887): 674.

⁸ Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 4, 6.

⁹ [Andrew Mearns], *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (London: James Clark & Co., 1883), 1.

¹⁰ George Haw, *Britain’s Homes: A Study of the Empire’s Heart-Disease*, (London: The Clarion Press, 1902), 53.

¹¹ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (1971. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993); Lawrence Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Social Science Association, 1857-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton:

shown, the forms and aspects the Social Question took in metropolitan Britain were inextricable from the imperial context, and in both metropole and colony questions of health, culture, language, commerce, and civilization were used to reflect on the meaning and purpose of the British empire.¹² Whilst the Housing Question has been acknowledged for its bearings on public health, economic development, and class tensions, it has not been considered within the context of the sharpening of racial thinking and the ratcheting up of imperial tensions that exactly matched its emergence as a Question.¹³ Thinking through the Housing Question in terms of its relationship to the men and women who were to work in and defend the British Empire was, however, fundamental to the solutions proposed to it, and above all to the most concrete and enduring one: council housing. Britain's council housing looks and functions quite differently from that of any of its peer nations, whether they be federal (the United States, Canada) or centralized (France) states, English-speaking (Australia) or not (Germany). This chapter, and this dissertation, argue that this is because of the role council housing was designed to play in the metropole of the British Empire.

The basic framework of council housing was set by the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890. Local authorities had their recently-gained (1868 and 1875) powers of slum clearance and redevelopment consolidated and extended and they were given new powers to buy land for the purposes of estate construction, to build dwellings, and then to let those dwellings to tenants.¹⁴ Council housing was the most radical solution to the Housing Question because, for the first time, the state in the form of local authorities could become a landlord, and could thus attempt to solve directly the largest and most consequential problem of the Housing Question: making homes that would produce fit, healthy, loyal subjects. The state-provided home was envisaged as a place where a racially healthy, morally responsible citizenry could be reared and the foundations for a new relationship between state and subject-citizen were laid. This position emerged in the decades before the First World War, it was the position taken up by Prime Minister David Lloyd George who put housing at the centre of his re-election campaign, launched thirteen days after the end of the war, and it was

Princeton University Press, 2004); G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹² Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal* 5 (1978): 9-65; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Aidan Forth, *Barbed Wire Imperialism: Britain's Empire of Camps, 1876-1903* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

¹³ The main studies of nineteenth-century experiments in working-class housing provision are Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum*, (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1977); Martin Daunt, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983) and J. A. Yelling, *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986). See also Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, Part II; Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design Since 1880*, 4th ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014); Tom Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830-1910* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016). On the rise of modern European racism see George L. Mosse, *Towards the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (1978. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), ch. 5; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1982); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2010). On rising imperial tensions see Searle, *A New England*, 474-525.

¹⁴ Part I of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 was derived from the slum clearance acts, the Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Acts, 1875-1885 and Part II from the Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Acts, 1868-1885 which allowed the demolition of individual unhealthy dwellings.

a relationship that emerged in full once public housing construction began in earnest in the 1920s. Traces of the Victorian framework remain in present-day housing law: returning to its origins allows us to see why council housing law was written the way it was. This chapter will investigate those origins and then proceed, in the following chapters, to the far-reaching repercussions for the law, for governance, and for Britons, that writing council housing law in this way had.

Part I: The Housing Question

Richard Assheton Cross, the then-Home Secretary for the Conservatives said to Parliament in 1875, “we make take it as an axiom that what the homes of the people are the people themselves will be found to be.”¹⁵ Saying this as he presented his slum clearance bill, Assheton Cross was correct to call it an axiom, and thirty years later the Housing Question was still being approached on that basis.¹⁶ “Among the potent influences comprised in the word ‘environment,’ which tend to make or mar the physical well-being of our citizens,” wrote surgeon and former Chairman of the London County Council (LCC) Sir William Collins in 1906, “scarcely any can compete in importance with those which relate to the home life and dwelling accommodation.”¹⁷ The interplay between ‘home life’ and ‘dwelling accommodation’ had to be analysed to determine how and to what extent it was affecting the children of the home. Only then could concrete suggestions for improvement be offered.

Accordingly, housing reformers set themselves to tease out all the problems caused by bad housing, and to elaborate their implications. The first and most obvious problem was disease, which was a physical, economic, political, and humanitarian problem. “Without health there is no true wealth,” Collins went on.¹⁸ The more sensational exposés of life in the slums dwelt on “almost every form of disease,” present, from the quick and deadly, cholera, typhoid, and measles, to the chronic, ophthalmia, scrofula, and, above all, tuberculosis.¹⁹ The more restrained quoted astonishing death rates localised to very small areas, for instance over seventy per thousand in one quarter of St Pancras, central London.²⁰ All these were only

¹⁵ 222 H. C. Parl. Deb. (3rd ser.) (1875) col. 98.

¹⁶ Victorians’ acute attention to ‘home surroundings’ has received much attention, though in a “resolutely domestic” fashion, as Peter Gurney put it in a review essay (“Wanting and Having: New Histories of Scarcity and Excess in Modern Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 1 (2009): 97). As well as cultural histories like Cohen’s (*Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), from various directions, there has been much work on the middle classes thinking about working-class home spaces, including in institutions (Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Steven J. Taylor, “Conceptualising the ‘Perfect’ Family in Late Nineteenth-Century Philanthropic Institutions,” in *Family Life in Britain, 1650-1910* ed. Carol Beardmore, Cara Dobbing, Steven King (2019)) in abusive surroundings (Louise A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2000)); and as a strand in eugenic thinking (Matthew Thompson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency: Eugenics, Democracy and Social Policy in Britain, 1870-1959* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)); in architectural history (Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870-1900* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1996). For a more theoretical consideration of the origins of these trends in the early- to mid-Victorian period see Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ William J. Collins, “The Better Housing of the Working Classes,” *The Bystander* 5 no. 62 (1905): 283.

¹⁸ Collins, “Better Housing,” 284.

¹⁹ George Sims, *How the Poor Live* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889), 17; *Bitter Cry*, 11-13; Edward Bowmaker, “The Facts as to Urban Overcrowding,” in *Houses for the Working Classes: How to Provide Them in Town and Country* (London: P. S. King, 1900), 8-12; G. Rome Hall, “Public Health and Politics,” *National Review* 14, no. 83 (1890): 612-13.

²⁰ Royal Commission, C. 4402, 14; W. St. John Brodrick, “The Homes of the Poor,” *Fortnightly Review* 32, no. 190 (1882): 422; R. C. Phillimore, “The Existing Situation in London: Statistics of the Problem,” in *Houses for the Working Classes*, 13-16; Arthur Newsholme, “The Vital Statistics of Peabody Buildings and Other Artisans’ and Labourers’ Block Dwellings,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 54, no. 1 (1891): 70-111; B. Seebohm

exacerbated by cold, draughty, dark, and dusty dwellings that lacked clean water, functioning fireplaces and chimneys, and space to wash or cook.²¹ The Royal Commission of 1885 estimated that after growing up in such a morbid environment, each adult workman and workwoman who lived in the London slums was so prone to ‘general debility’ that they lost on average twenty working days per year from exhaustion alone.²² This average did not count additional days of work missed due to active illness from perennial diseases like influenza or recovering from other physical ailments like accidents at work or childbirth.²³ Slums were called ‘rookeries,’ ‘warehouses’, and ‘plague spots’, while residents were described as ‘enfeebled’, “narrow-chested, toothless, pale, anæmic”, ‘weakly’, and wanting in stamina: all qualities, in short, that ‘handicapped’ the workman and the nation.²⁴ Maps like the below, of tuberculosis (phthisis) death rates per London sanitary district were a striking representation of the effect of locality on health.

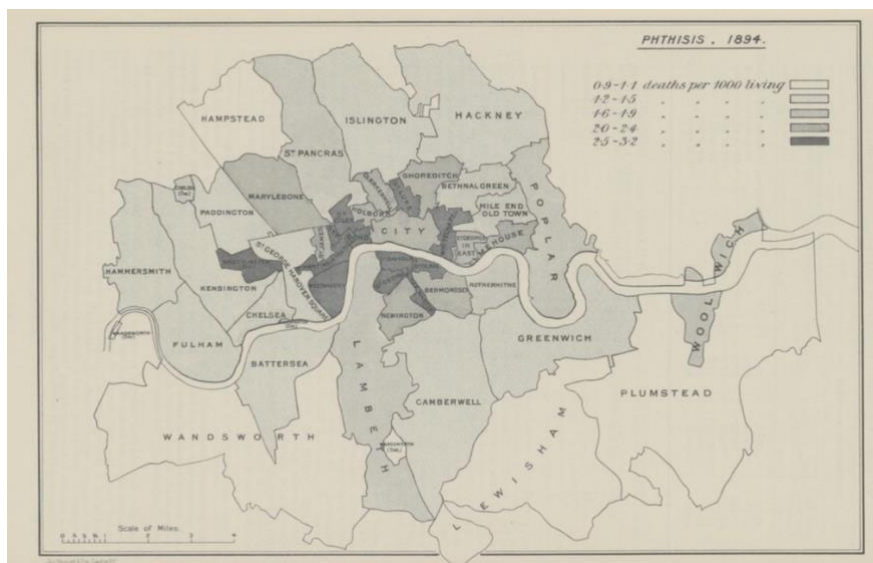


Fig. 1.1: London’s tuberculosis (phthisis) death rates per sanitary district, 1894.²⁵

Rowntree, “How Far it is Possible to Provide Satisfactory Houses for the Working Classes, at Rents which They Can Afford to Pay,” in *The Warburton Lectures for 1914* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1914), 4-6.

²¹ Rosalind Marryat, “Sanitary Aid,” *Nineteenth Century* 15 no. 87 (1884): 840-848. Gilbert W. Child, “Sanitary Legislation and the Homes of the Poor,” *Contemporary Review* 32 (1878): 298-300; Octavia Hill, “Common Sense and the Dwellings of the Poor,” *The Nineteenth Century*, 14, no. 82 (1883): 925-33.

²² C. 4402 vol. 1, 14-16.

²³ Edward Bowmaker, *The Housing of the Working Classes* (London: Methuen, 1895), chs. 1-2; Ernest Ritson Dewsnup, *The Housing Problem in England: Its Statistics, Legislation and Policy* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1907), 24, 27; Moritz Kaufmann, *The Housing of the Working Classes and of the Poor* (London: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1907), ch. 1

²⁴ Robert Williams, *London Rookeries and Colliers’ Slums: A Plea for More Breathing Room* (London: W. Reeves, 1893); Clara Jackson, “Housekeeping and National Well-Being,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 58, no. 342 (1905): 299; Kaufmann, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 3, 42; David S. Waterlow, “The Housing Question and the L.C.C.: A Reply,” *Fortnightly Review* 69, no. 409 (1901): 188; Dewsnup, *Housing Problem in England*, 24-26; Arthur Wesley Crompton, *The Housing Question* (London: Land Agents’ Record, 1901), ch. 1.; Haw, *Britain’s Homes*, ch. 5. Henry Lovegrove, “Housing the People in London and the Provinces,” *Journal of the Society of Architects* 2, no. 7 (1895): 161-62; Dunraven, “The Invasion of Destitute Aliens,” *Nineteenth Century* 31, no. 184 (1890): 997-98, Brabazon, “Great Cities and Social Reform,” *Nineteenth Century* 14 no. 81 (1883): 798-809.

²⁵ London County Council, *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Administrative County of London 1894* (London: London County Council, [1895]), interleaved 42-43. NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). Source: Wellcome Collection.

Nor was ill-health a problem for the working classes alone. In the preface to his book *The Housing of the Working Classes* Edward Bowmaker, a doctor, wrote that the problem had assumed a “national character” (emphasis original) as more and more people, and the State, came to realise “the danger.”²⁶ Their position as the workers who did the domestic labour of richer people, who dug the coal that powered the nation’s trains and factories, and who laboured in the factories that made Britain the ‘workshop of the world’ was such that without them the imperial enterprise would grind to a halt. John Sykes, Chief Medical Officer of the County of London argued in the Royal College of Physicians’ annual public health lecture series that bad housing was “the most serious public health problem now confronting us” because of the imperative to maintain the “stamina, energy, and health” of the populace so that they could continue to work, and would not infect the classes above them.²⁷ “If the poorer classes are housed in such a manner as to deteriorate health,” Sykes wrote, “other classes must also suffer.”²⁸ Christian Socialist vicar Moritz Kaufmann noted ironically that the disease aspect of the Housing Question was the most effective at marshalling support for action across the ideological spectrum: “Even the *Economist* reminds us that health, being the capital of the labouring man, to preserve it by providing him with a healthy home and workshop is to add to the ‘Wealth of Nations.’”²⁹ Kaufmann was correct; even those suspicious of state aid sapping private charity agreed that the matter of housing was one of “actual vital importance” the “health of future wage-earners depends” on the houses and districts they live in.³⁰ As *The Empire’s Heart-Disease* had claimed, this was a problem that transcended not just neighbourhoods, or even the nation, but actually had worldwide implications. The *Daily Mail* argued, “Without a healthy body there cannot be a healthy mind; without a healthy mind the nation cannot keep its place in the world,” and therefore endorsed action on both improving urban housing and urban transit to alleviate the “lamentable results of overcrowding.”³¹ Improving the health of the working classes by improving their housing was, in fact, a question of “national regeneration.”³²

In the eyes of observers this chronic ill-health and debility marked slum dwellers, set them apart, and made them into sources of disruption well beyond their position as vectors of disease. In his article “Public Health and Politics,” which concentrated largely on housing, G. Rome Hall wrote that ill-health endemic in the slums was fomenting discontent and “depraved physique breeds crime.”³³ The radical liberal *Westminster Review* made the same claim, arguing that that it was rare for there to be able-bodied men and women who could not find work. Instead, in the slums were the ‘outcasts’, “drunken and reckless”, not only unskilled, but also unfit to work because they were “slowly starving.”³⁴ By the turn of the twentieth century the eugenicist element of the housing question was clear, as in 1901 Arthur Wesley Crampton alleged that “the new generation is dwarfish both in physique and mentality.”³⁵

²⁶ Bowmaker, preface to *Housing of the Working Classes*, VI-VIII.

²⁷ John. F. Sykes, *Public Health and Housing* (London: P.S. King, 1901), 3, 2, 5; Lovegrove, “Housing the People,” 162-63.

²⁸ Sykes, *Public Health*, 8; Hall, “Public Health,” 598-615.

²⁹ Kaufmann, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 4. See also: “Lose No Time,” *Daily Mail* 6 March, 1899, p. 4 put it “The housing of the working classes is no party question; Conservative and Liberal, Unionist and Radical, are all equally concerned” and “A National Question,” *Daily Mail* 28 February, 1901, p. 4.

³⁰ Hall, “Public Health and Politics,” 600; Shaftesbury, “Mischief of State Aid.”

³¹ “A National Question,” *Daily Mail* 28 February, 1901, 4; Bowmaker, *Housing of the Working Classes*, ch. 15.

³² Kaufmann, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 142; H.G. Wells, “Certain Wholesale Aspects of Man-Making,” in *Mankind in the Making* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1903), 111.

³³ Hall, “Public Health and Politics.”

³⁴ Article VI – The Dwellings of the Poor,” *Westminster Review* 121, no. 241 (1884): 148-49.

³⁵ Crampton, *The Housing Question*, 31-32; Dunraven, “Destitute Aliens.”

The ‘national’ aspect of the question grew more racialized as the century wore on. Commentators denounced immigrants for their propensity for overcrowding and lack of understanding of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘orderliness.’³⁶ The Irish were a perpetual subject of criticism, but as immigration from southern and eastern Europe increased, a distinctly anti-Semitic note appeared. Anti-Semitic agitator Arnold White argued that a semi-criminal class had emerged that ought to be segregated from the rest of society. Through emigration to the settler colonies for some and national service for every male at home, those who were of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ stock were potentially redeemable, over time, but the ‘Jewish element’ was only destructive and instant laws to restrict the migration of Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms and poverty in Eastern Europe were needed.³⁷ Similarly, The *Daily Mail* reported on a meeting of the British Brothers’ League that was founded to object to ‘alien pauper immigration’ in part because they overcrowded the poor districts of London and lowered living standards.³⁸ Slum dwellers gradually came to be seen as a class physically and mentally distinct from the rest of the populace, both victims and sources of disease and degeneration.

This combination of disease, crime, degeneration, and poverty was, observers agreed, a humanitarian catastrophe but commentators were certain that slum dwellers were responsible, at least in part, for their own conditions thanks to complete ignorance of ‘civilisation.’³⁹ “We must sorrowfully admit that there are thousands of people in London who not only will not, but cannot, live decently,” opined the *Quarterly Review* because, “they do not know how.”⁴⁰ The conservative *Quarterly*’s conviction that the poor health of the working classes, and their poor living conditions, were caused as much by ignorance and immorality as by grinding poverty was one shared by almost all commentators who agreed that slum dwellers had no knowledge of the health, sanitation, or nutrition practices endorsed by the classes above them. The prevailing wisdom was that if slum dwellers were ‘transplanted’ immediately into “healthy and commodious homes...they would pollute and destroy them.”⁴¹

The language of pollution and destruction is drawn from one of Britain’s most famous and influential philanthropic housing developers and social reformers, Octavia Hill. No one expressed the conviction that bad housing was caused by people of bad, ignorant, and vicious character more forthrightly, or more adamantly than Octavia Hill, and no one, on the subject of how to manage slum dwellers, was accorded more authority, certainly in Britain, but to a lesser extent internationally as well.⁴² To tame her tenants’ ‘impulses’ and teach them self-

³⁶ Bowmaker, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 9-10.

³⁷ Crampton, *The Housing Question*; Arnold White, “The Nomad Poor of London,” *Contemporary Review* 47 (1885): 714-26; Lovegrove, “Housing the People,” 162-63; Compton, “The Homes of the People,” *The New Review* 1, no. 1 (1889): 47-61.

³⁸ “No Pauper Aliens Wanted,” *Daily Mail* 16 October, 1901 p. 3.

³⁹ William Torrens, “What is to be Done with the Slums?” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 39 no. 234 (1879): 533; George Howell, “The Dwellings of the Poor,” *The Nineteenth Century* 13 no. 76 (1883): 992, 994-95; H. O. Arnold-Forster, “The Existing Law,” *The Nineteenth Century* 14 no. 82 (1883): 940; Shaftesbury, “The Mischief of State Aid,” *The Nineteenth Century* 14 no. 82 (1883): 935-36; Joseph Chamberlain, “Labourers’ and Artisans’ Dwellings,” *Fortnightly Review* 34 no. 204 (1884): 761; Richard Assheton Cross, “Homes of the Poor,” *The Nineteenth Century* 15 no. 83 (1884): 240; “Population Problems,” *Daily Mail* 14 May, 1899 p. 3. Henrietta O. Barnett, “East London and Crime,” *National Review* 12, no. 70 (1888): 433-48.

⁴⁰ “Article VI,” *Quarterly Review* 157 no. 313 (1884): 155. See also Hall, “Public Health,” 602; Bernard Bosanquet, “Individual and Social Reform,” *Time* 19, no. 45 (1888): 312-26; Mary Jeune, “The Homes of the Poor,” *Fortnightly Review* 47, no. 227 (1890): 79.

⁴¹ Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (1875. London: Methuen, 1883): 10.

⁴² See Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* on Octavia Hill; Helen Dendy Bosanquet, *Social Work in London, 1869-1912: A History of the Charity Organisation Society* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1914), 42-43. Hill’s system of housing reform was essentially inimitable and never adopted on a wide scale, but her prolific writings and her

respect and self-control Hill made nothing but “slight” structural repairs to her slum properties until her tenants had “proved themselves capable of taking care of them.”⁴³ When she bought her unimproved slum properties Hill found the men among her existing tenants dirty, unreliable, drunk, and bad-tempered, often chronically underemployed thanks varying combinations of a lack of skills, poor character, and lingering pain from diseases and accidents. Their wives were no better, thoroughly ignorant when it came to cooking, cleaning, and managing their husbands’ meagre earnings, and just as ill-tempered and liable get into physical fights, both with their husbands and each other, as the men, especially “passionate” Irishwomen.⁴⁴ Hill and those who followed her argued that slum dwellers, even if they could see the value in cleanliness, neatness, punctuality, temperance, and prudence, which was always doubtful, had no idea how to practise those virtues and, worse, could not pass them on to their children even if they wanted to.⁴⁵

The other major issue with slum dwellers was their sexual deviancy. “Incest is common,” *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* stated baldly.⁴⁶ Sexual deviancy, described through overcrowding, was an indispensable tool in proving the inadequacy and danger of slum populations.⁴⁷ Writers consistently evoked the spectacle of large, poor families whose children ranged from adult unmarried ones to babies and toddlers all sleeping in one or two rooms, and sharing one or two beds.⁴⁸ These sleeping arrangements were very far from the bourgeois ideal and the purpose of the contrast was always to carry the suggestion, if not the statement, of sexual deviancy.⁴⁹ Commentators alleged that even aside from extreme forms of deviancy, cohabitation without marriage and adultery were common, with many young people not seeing the point of marriage at all.⁵⁰ Even if they did get married, the early marriages of the urban working classes were ‘improvident;’ the *Westminster Review* recounted a Dissenting minister discovering to his consternation that half the brides were only seventeen, and half the grooms under twenty. “Does this not account for much poverty, for much infantile disease, and for much overcrowding?” asked the reviewer.⁵¹ This left working-class families unstable and only encouraged other forms of delinquency that were latent. Henrietta Barnett, a contemporary and acquaintance of Hill and a social reformer in

long connection – almost from its founding – to the powerful Charity Organisation Society made her a highly influential figure on everything to do with housing and heritage preservation. Hill’s views achieved very wide dissemination, as her schemes were described, and her opinions quoted, in international conferences on housing and urban planning (1905, 1907), and in policy documents into the 1920s and 1930s (Ministry of Health, *Second and Final Report of the Unhealthy Areas Committee* (London: HMSO, 1921), 9; Central Housing Advisory Committee, Sub-Committee on Housing Management Schedule 17 February 1937 and responses from local authorities, TNA/HLG 37/18). She was also quoted approvingly in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s *Charter for Social Housing Residents* (London: HMSO, 2020), 8.

⁴³ Hill, *London Poor*, 19.

⁴⁴ Hill, *London Poor*, 28, 48.

⁴⁵ Hill, *London Poor*; Jackson, “Housekeeping,” 298-301; Rosalind Marryat, “Sanitary Aid,” *Nineteenth Century* 15, no. 87 (1884): 843-45; Rev. Arthur Robbins, letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail*, 28 February, 1898 p. 4.

⁴⁶ *Bitter Cry*, 12. Walkowitz (*City of Dreadful Delight*) and Koven (*Slumming*) highlight the transgressive appeal of the slums. See also Jason Finch, “The Origin of Slum as a Trans-Class Concept,” *Journal of Urban History* 49, no. 3 (2023): 492-504.

⁴⁷ Williams, *London Rookeries*, 5; Bowmaker, “The Facts on Urban Overcrowding,” 8-12 and *The Housing of the Working Classes*; Sykes, *Public Health*, 29-30; William Mitchell, “‘Homes’ of Poor Children,” *Good Words* 27, (Jan 1886): 619

⁴⁸ C. 4402; Kaufmann; *How the Poor Live*, Mitchell, “‘Homes’ of Poor Children,” 618-20. Bowmaker, “The Facts on Urban Overcrowding,” 11; Welsh Housing Association, *Examination of Housing Conditions* (London: The Welsh Housing Association, 1911), Part II, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way*, 143-45.

⁵⁰ *Bitter Cry*; *How the Poor Live*.

⁵¹ “Article VI – The Dwellings of the Poor,” *Westminster Review*, 150.

her own right, summed up the life of London slum dwellers as an “animal and selfish existence” destined repeat itself *ad nauseum*.⁵²

The crux of the problem was the slum children.⁵³ In such an environment, with parents who could not even begin to teach them how to achieve “intellectual and public-spirited ideas,” slum children were “habitually dirty, quarrelsome, and violent.”⁵⁴ When they were not engaged in “wild, lawless fighting or gambling,” their games were devoid of skill or purpose and that if they had any “meaning or influence, it must be bad.”⁵⁵ Lord Shaftesbury argued before the Royal Commission that it was “impossible to say how fatal the result” was for moral education in families who lived in one room and slept in one bed. He and others were certain that constant exposure of young children to *so much* licentious behaviour on daily display in densely-populated slums could only encourage them to adopt such ways themselves.⁵⁶ He and others offered descriptions of children as young as ten having, or attempting to have, sexual intercourse with one another, let alone with adults (a separate issue). Lord Shaftesbury described how a friend of his had caught a ten-year-old girl and an eleven-year-old boy on the pavement of a back court and the boy said “Why do you take hold of me? There are a dozen of them at it down there.”⁵⁷ In 1907 investigative journalist George Sims, who had specialized in sensationalized coverage of the poorest parts of London and other major cities since the early 1880s, wrote that he had produced his latest collection of essays and photographs of Britain’s ‘residuum’ because he wanted “to see...the conditions of family life in homes in which the nursing mother spent a large portion of the day and night in drinking.”⁵⁸ The resulting book, *The Black Stain*, covered London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Sheffield and Cardiff, and Sims told readers that in his travels he had met with “horrors which might easily be believed in...the Congo...but which will seem almost incredible when related of little children martyred in English homes.”⁵⁹ He protested that the “tortured children who suffer and survive will only do so with stunted bodies and enfeebled minds, to become the physical, moral, and mental wreckage which burdens the State and fills the lunatic asylums, the workhouses, and the jails.”⁶⁰

Journalist Arthur Wesley Crampton introduced his contribution to the Housing Question, a short book entitled *The Housing Question* (1901), as follows:

Slums are national sores. They therefore require legislative and municipal cauterization. In our case there is especial need of this. We are in the van of the world. Our Empire is ever-increasing. We are charged with the responsibility of

⁵² Barnett, “East London,” 441-42.

⁵³ Jeune, “Homes of the Poor,” 79-80.

⁵⁴ Barnett, “East London,” 441-42; Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, 28-29; Welsh Housing Association, *Examination of Housing Conditions Part II* (1911), 14; a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* blamed the “filthy language” heard on London’s streets from the “indiscriminate mixing of slum children with the more refined” at board schools, and also argued that this kind of language “would not be tolerated for one moment” in Australia “in this as in many other things, is far before us.” ‘A Working Man’, letter to the editor, “London’s Bad Language,” *Daily Mail* 21 August 1899, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, 29. “Gutter Dramas: Realistic Performances by London Gamins,” *Daily Mail* 6 December 1897, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Mitchell, “‘Homes,’” 620; Marryat, “Sanitary Aid,” Barnett, “East London and Crime,” Sims, *How the Poor Live; Bitter Cry*.

⁵⁷ Lord Shaftesbury, C. 4402 Vol. II, Minutes of Evidence of the Royal Commission, 2. Lord Shaftesbury’s evidence to the Royal Commission was still being cited in 1913: see London County Council, *Housing of the Working Classes in London* (London: P. S. King, 1913), 167-68.

⁵⁸ George R. Sims, preface to *The Black Stain* (London: Jarrolds, 1907), xii.

⁵⁹ Sims, *Black Stain*, 2-3.

⁶⁰ Sims, *Black Stain*, 12, 11.

maintaining, consolidating and developing it. This task demands the bracing of the Anglo-Saxon race to the highest pitch. The arm wants nerving to fight, the body wants strengthening for labour... We cannot gather figs from thistles. We are compelled, therefore, to remove plague spots – unhealthy areas – from our midst.⁶¹

Crampton, Brabazon and others posited that no less than the entirety of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ civilization was at stake in the slums. They argued that the release of public money for slum clearance, and the moral tutelage of former slum dwellers, should be thought of as a project analogous to, and as noble as, the compensation paid to owners of enslaved people upon emancipation. Neither slum clearance nor emancipation were ‘paying propositions’, Hill wrote in 1875, but the moral benefits, both from liberation from slums or slavery, and from the subsequent training of slum dwellers or enslaved people in domesticity and ‘civilization’ were immeasurable and so, therefore, were the political and economic benefits that could only follow this moral transformation.⁶²

Lifting working-class people out of their bestial lives was accordingly work for a “civilized State.”⁶³ Sidney Webb argued that the greatest need of London, site of the most notorious slums, was “the growth among its citizens of a greater sense of common life” so as to enable the punishment of negligent landlords because the housing of too many Londoners was “unworthy for a civilized community”.⁶⁴ Webb’s *London Programme* was an extended manifesto on all the elements that were holding London back from becoming a true ‘imperial capital’, not merely housing but also London’s complicated and overlapping system of municipal governance, its poor provision of utilities like water and gas, its hospitals, and its inefficiencies in labour and land ownership. If all of these different spheres of metropolitan life were rationalized and simplified, Londoners would live fuller, more productive, more fulfilling, more *civilized* lives – which was, after all, their birthright as natives of the imperial capital of the world.⁶⁵ The *Daily Mail* in 1900 concurred: “London... is not only a municipal area; it is the capital of an empire.” In fact, the *Daily Mail* ended up endorsing the Progressive candidates for the London County Council because of their “hard work and intelligent administration” on behalf of ‘the imperial city’ because the “health of London,” as well as “the virility, stamina, morality, and example of Londoners are factors in the problem of Empire throughout the world.”⁶⁶

Slums were “race murder,” and a matter for “the citizen, the patriot, and the statesman to consider.”⁶⁷ The rhetoric of unfit and decline reached all the way to the Prime Minister’s office: George Haw quoted Lord Rosebery, former prime minister, as asking in 1900, “What is an Empire unless it is pillared on an Imperial race, and what are you doing if you allow this imperial race to be vitiated and poisoned in the dens of crime and horror in which too many of them are reared...?”⁶⁸ It was, in fact, a call to action as William Lever, founder of Lever Bros. Soap Company (now Unilever), well understood. As well as constructing Port Sunlight, the famous model village built for the workers at the Merseyside

⁶¹ Crampton, introduction to *Housing Question*, 2.

⁶² Octavia Hill, preface to the first edition of *Homes of the London Poor*. 1875. 1883. Mitchell, “‘Homes,’” 621; H. H. Champion, “The New Labour Party,” *Nineteenth Century* 24, no. 137 (1888): 81-93.

⁶³ A. C. Pigou, “Some Aspects of the Housing Problem,” *The Warburton Lectures for 1914*, 36.

⁶⁴ Sidney Webb, preface to *The London Programme* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1891), v.

⁶⁵ See also Arthur Cawston, *A Comprehensive Scheme for Street Improvements in London* (London: Edward Stanford, 1893).

⁶⁶ “Workers and Shirkers,” *Daily Mail* 25 February, 1900, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Sims, *Black Stain*, 12.

⁶⁸ Haw, *Britain’s Homes*, 54.

Sunlight Soap factory, Lever went to Australia and addressed a number of meetings of Australian town planners, arguing that they were doing well because, “It would be impossible to build up an imperial virile race in an ill-planned, congested town... Humanity demands air and light... also, social intercourse for the proper development of the brain and character.”⁶⁹ The wide dissemination of Lever’s views of what made a fit imperial race – well-planned houses and towns – throughout the Anglosphere, as well as the widespread acceptance of Port Sunlight as the gold standard in worker housing by numerous people interested in modernization, including the Crown Prince of Siam, who toured and spoke at Port Sunlight in 1901, underline the broadly accepted link that healthy homes did not just make healthy, industrious workers, those workers were to be the backbone of a reinvigorated imperial race that spanned the globe and were to continue to maintain the relationship between an Anglo-dominated imperial capitalism and modernizing states within the informal empire.

Part II: Mending People: The Solutions to the Housing Question

For the observers who favoured philanthropy, leading by example was best. Under the ‘Octavia Hill’ method, tenants were monitored closely, strictly, and in person by lady-superintendents who, as well as collecting rent, were responsible for providing training on how to cook and clean and then for ensuring that their tenants did so. This kind of strict personal training was by no means at odds with a strict liberalism. Fundamentally opposed to state aid in any form, banker Arthur Raffalovich contributed an essay on housing to *A Plea for Liberty*, an essay collection edited by Herbert Spencer, arguing that the Octavia Hill method and close personal example, as well as the spread of property ownership, were the only ways that the poor could be taught to have a higher standard of living and of politics.⁷⁰ He was clear that the state should only deal with *public* issues like sanitation and structural soundness of buildings; it was for private individuals and private philanthropy to deal with *inside* the home; only in this manner could demoralization be avoided and moral standards be raised. Economist A. C. Pigou concurred, arguing that although the state was there to set minimum standards, moral education could be performed by private individuals alone.⁷¹

The link between public health and state regulation was such that even liberals opposed to state aid for housing in any form approved of tightening sanitary regulations and regular inspections.⁷² The young Beatrice Potter, later Webb, began her career of social work as a rent collector for philanthropic housing. She called rent collectors trained by Octavia Hill “the modern class of *governing women*”, saying that they spoke with a “peculiar mixture of sympathy and authority” to “their people”.⁷³ Potter was, however, disappointed that Hill and her collector, Emma Cons, employed no ‘fact or theory’ in their housing improvement schemes but instead depended on their own personal knowledge of their tenants, which they kept ‘all in their heads’.⁷⁴ This criticism was implicit for those who praised the consolidation efforts that heralded the inauguration of the London County Council in 1889. In 1899 in the *Fortnightly Review* Christina Sinclair Bremner argued that the three most consequential acts

⁶⁹ William Lever, “The Australasian Tour,” *Garden Cities and Town Planning* 4, no. 3 (1914): 54-55. Richard B. Watrous, secretary of the American Civic Association, quoted the same extract of Lever’s letter in a report on housing developments in Europe to the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, and U.S. Congressman William P. Borland of Missouri had it inserted into the Congressional Record on September 17, 1914. Richard B. Watrous, *Personal Observations of Some Housing Developments in Europe* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 2.

⁷⁰ Arthur Raffalovich, “The Housing of the Working Classes and the Poor,” In *A Plea for Liberty* ed. Thomas Mackay (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), 275-301.

⁷¹ Pigou, “Some Aspects of the Housing Problem,” 48-49.

⁷² See e.g. Raffalovich, “Housing of the Working Classes.”

⁷³ Beatrice Webb, diary vol. 1, ed. Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie (London: Virago, 1982-85), 134.

⁷⁴ Webb, diary, vol. 1, 168-69.

affecting the wellbeing of the working classes over the last half century had been the two reform acts that enfranchised between them a majority of working-class men in 1867 and 1884, the elementary education acts, and the 1890 Housing Act respectively. Bremner was sceptical that the enfranchisement of working men had caused the education and housing acts, suggesting that it was in fact the “increased sense of duty and responsibility among the middle and upper classes” that had secured these other acts. In this spirit she praised the Housing Act for clearing the way for *both* philanthropic housing companies and the London County Council, and her analysis treated the LCC’s developments as just the same as the philanthropic ones. She argues that the regulation provided by the 1890 Act and then care taken to select good managers is sufficient. While she stresses the need for good managers and writes that philanthropic housing will fail if managers are not punctilious at extracting rent from tenants and keeping buildings in good order, she mainly emphasises that the good *quality* housing (where the LCC’s developments fall a little short) is made easier to secure by the 1890 act. Bremner is more explicit than many when she points out that it is “autocratic” power in Berlin that “allows no slum ever to take a firm hold” and similarly she approves of the practice in Australia and New Zealand of town councils buying up land surrounding towns and mandating effective development, rather than allowing suburban slums to develop. Bremner is relatively relaxed about state power precisely because it is only through large-scale developments does she see any hope for mass improvements. She concludes by writing, “municipal housing has come to stay” because after security public health is the second duty of any State.⁷⁵

The gradual creation of measures to compel local authorities to inspect houses and to demolish and replace those that contravened did not mean that the moral education project espoused by Octavia Hill was by any means discredited or forgotten. However, the conviction that not merely morality, but also physical and mental strength depended on housing conditions, made the argument that ensuring that kind of health, rather than moral health, was the kind that could be ensured by the state. William Mitchell vice-chairman of the School Board of Glasgow, argued that it should be a statutory duty of parents to provide “suitable lodging” for their children, in particular arguing that the law should mandate that “in no case shall girls over ten years of age and boys over twelve years of age lodge in the same apartment”.⁷⁶

Ensuring ‘civilized’ living conditions through public health legislation came to be seen as an important duty, allied to the security of a state’s subjects, and became a wedge issue in the battles over how to reform London governance.⁷⁷ From the passage of the first slum clearance act in 1868 onwards these local authorities had been criticised for their near-complete refusal to use any of the permissive powers granted to them to ameliorate bad housing and poor sanitary conditions in London.⁷⁸ Vestries and district boards were attacked for being beholden to lower-middle-class ratepayers who lacked a ‘sense of duty’ toward their fellow subjects, being too fond of low rates, or, sometimes even profiting from poor

⁷⁵ C. S. Bremner, “London Buildings,” *Fortnightly Review* 66 (1899): 316; Lord Rosebery, letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* 24 September 1900, p. 5.

⁷⁶ Mitchell, “‘Homes’,” 620.

⁷⁷ John Davis, *Reforming London: The London Government Problem, 1855-1900*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 87-92. On contemporaries’ understanding that housing was a major driver in the creation of the London County Council see Charles Sheridan Jones, “The Housing Question and the L.C.C.,” *Fortnightly Review* 68, no. 408 (1900): 967-68 and Gwilym Gibson and Reginald W. Bell, *History of the London County Council, 1889-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 53-55; 596-97.

⁷⁸ “Article VI – The Dwellings of the Poor,” 144-45; Chamberlain, “Labourers’ and Artisans’ Dwellings,” 766; Bernard Bosanquet, “Individual and Social Reform,” *Time* 19, no. 45 (1888): 312-26; David F. Schloss, “Healthy Homes for the Working Classes,” *Fortnightly Review* 43, no. 246 (1888): 18-28; Jeune, “Homes of the Poor,” 76-77; Sheridan Jones, “The Housing Question,” 967.

conditions, especially as slumlords, to countenance raising rates even if public works were desperately needed. The creation of the LCC and the gradual streamlining and integration of local London administration with the LCC was supposed to overcome the obstacles that hindered – or let small local authorities claim to be hindered – in undertaking large-scale developments.⁷⁹

The gradual compulsion of local authorities and attempt to rationalise their powers was an expression of the growing consensus that in a “civilized State” there were “acceptable minimum standards below which one is not allowed to fall” and it was expressed in the proliferation of not just housing acts, but related Public Health, Nuisance, and Building Acts that came to regulate both new developments and existing houses around the country.⁸⁰ The argument ran that if the government properly enforced building standards, and prevented unscrupulous landlords from profiting off them, the people would then have space to flourish.

The issue then would be how to ensure that the newly-housed working classes would learn all of the skills that an Octavia Hill scheme would teach them. The journalists Frederick Greenwood and Clara Jackson, and the politician Lord Brabazon pinned their hopes on a combination of improved housing and a new and different kind of education – physical exercises and domestic science. Teaching children to exercise properly and the girls to cook and to clean properly, as well as basic information about healthy eating, was considered the surest way to prevent degeneration as working-class families moved into new developments. Echoing the abolitionist preachers who tried to induce what they called ‘artificial wants’ in formerly enslaved Jamaicans earlier in the century Frederick Greenwood praised greater education because it “creates taste and adds to the number of absolute wants”, namely “a liking for fresh linen...order, brightness, sweetness in the home”.⁸¹ The Welsh Housing Association, which included future prime minister David Lloyd George among its members, summed up its program with the following exhortation:

EDUCATE the people to WANT better houses. To sacrifice something in order to get them. To use them well when found.
EDUCATE those aspiring to place on the Statutory bodies so that they shall know and put into effect the powers now existing.
EDUCATE the house and land owners so that they do not forget that they have obligations as well as privileges.
EDUCATE ALL to the fact that without healthy homes, the country cannot be truly great or prosperous.⁸²

These educative and regulatory programs contained a vision of a bolder and more sweeping reforms than those suggested by projects of moral reclamation. While local authorities, medical officers of health, and philanthropic building companies remade the faces of cities, the education of working-class children to care for their bodies and their minds would remake the family.

⁷⁹ Gibson and Bell, *History of the County Council*, 53-56; London County Council, *Classification and Description of the Powers of the London County Council* (London: Southwood Smith, 1910).

⁸⁰ H. G. Wells, “Aspects of Man-Making”; “A Plea for Raising Our Utopias at Home,” *Daily Mail* 14 February 1898, p. 3; Pigou, “Some Aspects of the Housing Problem,” 36.; Webb, *London Programme*.

⁸¹ Frederick Greenwood, “Misery in Great Cities,” *Nineteenth Century* 25, no. 147 (1889): 742; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 125.

⁸² Welsh Housing Association, preface to *Housing Conditions of Wales*, Part I, iii.

These two reformatory projects would work together, and both of them were frequently compared to similar efforts in France, Germany, and the United States. For all that Octavia Hill was internationally recognised and praised, the impending degeneration of large swathes of the working class meant that larger and more uniform programs of reform were needed. The mass physical education movements of the late nineteenth century, their links to militarism and ‘soft’ eugenic arguments about race, physical fitness, and power, are well-known, but housing stood behind all of these. Housing was no longer to be the province of the local and the personal because the individual bodies of working-class Europeans were now the building blocks of transcontinental empires.⁸³ All of this was supposed to sweep out the old, smoky, degenerate Britain, and allow Britons to flourish as their counterparts in France, Germany, and Australia were said to be doing. Housing was therefore no exception to the pattern of policies being introduced in colonies before being tried at home, as the Labourers (Ireland) Act of 1883 was the first to provide central government subsidies for house building and to allow local authorities to build cottages with small allotments for rural labourers and their families.⁸⁴ The regularization of the working-class home was seen as a key component in a broader regularization of working-class life which included mass education, newer and stricter forms of mass politics, and wider redevelopments of cities and working-class districts that marked the late nineteenth century, from Berlin and Paris to Chicago.

This imperial competition also manifested itself in a determination that housing developments, whilst inspired by and in competition with those of other empires, should also be sites to draw out, or implant, a certain kind of Englishness – again, in common with other housing developments in other places that were thought to help Frenchmen be more French, and Germans be more Prussian. The desire for house and home, ‘a bit of garden’, were held to be distinctively and essentially English. Interventions into working-class homes and neighbourhoods, and the construction of cottage estates, were thus framed as a recovery of the working-class family’s essential ‘Englishness’, just as teaching wives and mothers was described as providing working-class women with skills that their grandmothers had had, that their mothers, corrupted by industrial life, had lost.⁸⁵ Housing developments, it was hoped, would institutionalize this kind of Englishness among the working classes. It was not lost on commentators how housing developments in other countries were attempting to achieve the same object. Budgett Meakin published *Model Factories and Villages: Ideal Conditions of Labour and Housing* in 1905, a large book boasting over two hundred photographs of factories and housing developments from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands. Meakin, like many others, argued that the housing problem “underlies almost every social problem of working-class life” and that the most enlightened and advanced industrialists knew that “the employee gains in having good health; the firm is rewarded by the men’s continuous service.”⁸⁶ Whether it was company towns in the United States, philanthropic villages in England, or public-private developments in Germany, Meakin’s book shows images of polished model villages that are all calculated to invoke a kind of old-fashioned charm and are deliberately reminiscent of vanishing village life. (Some of the philanthropic developments in Britain are in fact an exception). The deliberate erasure

⁸³ Cawston, *Comprehensive Scheme*, ch. 2; Bowmaker, preface to *Housing of the Working Classes*, VIII; “How to House London,” *Daily Mail* 11 November 1898, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Murray Fraser, *John Bull’s Other Homes: State Housing and British Policy in Ireland, 1883-1922* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996); Enda McKay, “The Housing of the Rural Labourer, 1883-1916,” *Saothar* 17 (1992): 27.

⁸⁵ Jackson, “Housekeeping;” Brabazon, “Decay of Bodily Strength;” Greenwood, “Misery in Great Cities.”

⁸⁶ Budgett Meakin, *Model Factories and Villages: Ideal Conditions of Labour and Housing* (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs), 351, 120.

of modern industrial life and the continual invocation of an older Englishness, or Frenchness, or Prussianness, suggests that these housing developments were intended not only to produce good workers, but also workers who understood themselves as the heirs and representatives of distinctive national-imperial traditions. Their housing would shape them into the modern equivalents of sturdy Prussian, Gallic, or Anglo-Saxon peasants that were imagined to be the progenitor of these European empires' imperial destinies.

The blend of paternalism and profit with the goal of strength and efficiency on display at Port Sunlight was held up by many commentators as the model to emulate. Architect E. C. P. Monson's article on the housing of the working classes from 1912 is a good example of how, on the eve of the First World War, physiological concerns about the health and strength of the working classes had become more prominent than those concerning their moral character, but the moral element never disappeared. Monson argued that the nation must look to its "sons of toil" for the working of the "national machine" and that the machine would "go wrong" if the parts were not kept in good working order. The home, because it was where wives worked and children grew was as important to "good health" of families and the nation as "adequate nutrition and proper clothing". He was therefore particularly concerned about pregnant women and children. In the case of pregnant women, he said that cottages with gardens were the ideal, but, if they were impossible, low blocks of flats with easy access to a shared garden so that women could get fresh air easily, every day, without having to trek to distant public parks. For children he insisted on separate bedrooms, no matter if the dwelling was a cottage or a flat, because "the delicacy and privacy of youth form one of the most important conditions for physical improvement".⁸⁷ However, Monson also pushed back against commentators who said that because working-class families never used a 'best room', they did not need one. Monson wrote that while a 'best room' might well become a "cemetery of wax flowers" he himself was a "strong advocate of the parlour or best room" because he saw the "quiet but strong desire of the workman's wife to have one good room for pleasure, as a healthy desire of great social value... The housewife realises... [the room] is a proof of the ability of the family to have a separate room for social life as distinct from work-a-day life."⁸⁸ Monson's three major concerns were the physical health of pregnant women and their children; the appropriate physical and sexual development of children; and how house design could help working-class families practice and perform appropriate domestic standards.

Part III: The Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890

Of all the different solutions to the housing crisis proposed, state-funded council housing and slum clearance embodied the most radical vision of Britain and its empire at the dawn of the new century. This was for two reasons: the criteria applied to evaluate working-class homes and families, and because of the way in which this set of criteria was scaled up to apply throughout the United Kingdom. The criteria was a schema of fitness/unfitness applied equally – for the first time – to every slum in the country and the act was the first piece of housing legislation to be implemented in each of the four nations that made up the United Kingdom. It was the first time the state intervened deliberately and in a sustained fashion in the private residential rental sector, the first time it acted as a residential landlord, and the first time slums were cleared for identical reasons – simply because they were slums – in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. By 1899 Alderman W. Thompson, of Richmond,

⁸⁷ E. C. P. Monson, "The Housing of the Working Classes," *Journal of the Society of Architects* 5, no. 53 (1912): 177.

⁸⁸ Monson, "Housing of the Working Classes," 178-9. Sidney Waterlow, successful businessman and philanthropic developer expressed the same conviction, see George Smalley, *The Life of Sir Sydney H. Waterlow, Bart.* (London: Edward Arnold, 1909), 61.

Surrey, a keen supporter of housing reform, was able to list schemes proposed and work in progress or completed in 23 English cities, including major ones in each region (London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sheffield, Plymouth), as well as Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock, Dublin, Swansea, and Douglas, on the Isle of Man.⁸⁹ This was the culmination of a wider movement in counting and surveying houses, where ‘house’ was first defined in 1851 (the same year as the Common Lodging Houses Acts), standardised in 1860 at the International Statistical Congress, held in London; the 1891 census refined this still further by counting the number of rooms in a house, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more.⁹⁰

Even though every local council was most proud of their new cottage estates, the animating feature of the 1890 Act was not the construction of new homes, but the destruction of old ones. The only duties laid on local authorities came under Parts I and II, the parts of the act devoted to slum clearance. Part III, estate construction, was wholly permissive.⁹¹ After the 1890 Act, every urban local authority was required to assess whether its housing stock was unfit. Part I applied to every urban area in the country and the 1890 Act extended the obligation to root out individual unhealthy properties, in the form of Part II, from urban sanitary districts, already obliged under the Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Acts 1868-1885, to every sanitary district in the kingdom. Parts I and II of the 1890 Act rendered urban areas across the nation equivalent *and*, by subjecting rural Britain and Ireland to the same schema of unfitness, the 1890 Act presented working-class families’ housing needs as the same everywhere, interpreted the problems of slums as the same everywhere, and determined that they could be attacked in the same way everywhere. For the first time all of the peoples of Britain could be evaluated according to whether their home was ‘fit’ or not.

The Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 and the municipal estates undertaken under it produced in law and practice a unified vision of what made a working-class home, and therefore family, fit or unfit. With some minor exceptions and one major one (the Labourers’ (Ireland) Acts, 1883-85), the 1890 Act repealed all existing housing and slum clearance legislation.⁹² The greater powers governing housing in Ireland and their origin in the island’s relationship with Britain did not go unnoticed. In 1911 the Welsh Housing Association argued that the imperial government should “Give Wales the advantages Ireland has” because Wales’s distinctive history, geography, economy, society, and position within the United Kingdom had created a unique housing crisis for which the existing legislation was ill-equipped because it did not distinguish Wales from England.⁹³ The preamble to the 1875 Artizans Dwellings Improvement Act had described the areas intended to fall under its remit as “various portions of many cities and boroughs are so built, and the buildings thereon are so densely inhabited, as to be highly injurious to the moral and physical welfare of the inhabitants.”⁹⁴ The 1890 Act dispensed with any kind of preamble and retained only the language of unfitness. In their annotated edition of the 1890 Act barristers W. C. Bernard and H. Morgan-Brown glossed the aim of Part I as the “elimination of unhealthy areas”, with Part II providing for the “demolition of unhealthy or obstructive” buildings “where the fewness of

⁸⁹ W. Thompson, *Housing of the Working Classes with a Description of the Richmond Municipal Cottages* (Richmond: Borough of Richmond, 1899), 9-16. See also Webb, *London Programme*, 128-35.

⁹⁰ Introduction to *Census of England and Wales 1931: Housing: Reports and Tables* (London: HMSO, 1935) v.

⁹¹ Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, 53 & 54 Vict., c. 70, s. 54.

⁹² The Labourers’ (Ireland) Acts gave Ireland’s non-urban local authorities the power to demolish insanitary cottages of landless labourers and replace them with habitable ones. See McKay, “Housing of the Rural Labourer.”

⁹³ Welsh Housing Association, *Housing Conditions in Wales*. Part II, 41.

⁹⁴ Preamble to the Artizans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Improvement Act (38 & 39 Vict., c. 36).

the buildings, or the smallness of the area, renders it inexpedient to proceed under Part I.”⁹⁵ By streamlining, updating, and combining a piecemeal set of statutes from the preceding forty years into a workable standard and set of procedures, the state marked off slums and council estates as a new kind of space for families that were either fit or unfit. Every sanitary district in the entire country now had a uniform set of standards by which to evaluate houses as ‘fit’ or ‘unfit’. The power to *make* homes, and the families within them, fit were standardised and gathered together in one place for England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Alderman Thompson described the constructive powers of the act (italics are Thompson’s):

it enables local authorities to build houses for the working classes whenever they think fit to do so. Except in rural districts, there is no provision whatever limiting the power of the local authority; no certificate or other formal proof of deficient house accommodation is requisite; no insanitary property need be closed or demolished. The local authority can build at any time and for any reason which may seem good to them...*Land can be purchased compulsorily* if necessary...and no lease, settlement, entail or other private arrangement can debar a local authority from acquiring it.⁹⁶

Thompson makes clear the expansive compulsive vision that was written in to the 1890 Housing Act, but the act itself was full of hedges; the idea of limiting the state’s coercive powers and granting them permissive ones instead remained. It was in this act that the tension between permissive and compulsive became explicit: how were the working classes to be made fit without compulsive powers? The answer lay in the housing itself, that would select for and create the right kind of tenant.

The idea of a ‘fit’ tenant, drawn from the debate over the slum crisis and the Housing Question was written into the Housing of the Working Classes Act and the developments built under it. The housing that was built was explicitly for a certain kind of tenant, defined in the legislation by both a ceiling and a floor. Who could be considered ‘working class’ was, like suffrage, dependent on property. These were slippery, however, so the Housing of the Working Classes Act incorporated two pre-existing definitions and used them both. The first was drawn from the Settled Land Acts, 1882-1890, which defined the working classes as “all persons earning their livelihood by wages or salaries” but dwelling in buildings with a rateable value of less than £100 per annum. The second came from the 1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act which defined a house let for the working classes as, in England, one not exceeding the sum named as the limit for the composition of rates for the Poor Rate, and in Scotland and Ireland a house let for £4.⁹⁷ The ceiling, was therefore in part paying poor rates; the floor was receiving them. Section 63 of the Act barred new municipal housing developments from being let to anyone in receipt of poor relief (except for accident or temporary illness), whether that be the tenant themselves or their spouse.

Within these statutory boundaries, council and philanthropic housing added further conditions to tenancy and constructed their properties so as to house the fit tenants. Residents were to be sociable, humble, orderly, clean, and industrious: everything that slum dwellers

⁹⁵ W. C. Bernard and H. Morgan-Brown, *The Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 with Notes, Introduction and Forms* (London: Butterworth, 1891), 2, 8.

⁹⁶ Thompson, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 6. Thompson’s book was commended by the Prince of Wales, “Prince and the Poor: H.R.H on the Great Housing Question,” *Daily Mail* 16 June 1899, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, ss. 74, 75; Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1885, s. 11; Settled Land Act, 1890 53 & 54 Vict. c. 69, s. 18.

were not. It was here that the influence of Octavia Hill was seen most clearly as councils and philanthropic dwelling companies wrote their rules for tenants with a twofold aim, both to suppress inappropriate behaviours and to require appropriate ones. The Leeds Sub-Sanitary Committee deputation collected the rules and application procedures from every development – council estates, municipal lodging houses, philanthropic developments – they visited. Each set of rules stressed that rent must be paid in advance and prohibited tips to employees and superintendents, most prohibited gambling, and a number also mandated that anyone using foul language would be asked to leave.⁹⁸ These were the kind of rules that were intended to smother the riotous and freewheeling behaviour associated with the slums. To make families fit the ideal, rules moved towards encouraging respectable behaviour. Residents were forbidden from subletting their flats and cottages, minimizing the risk of overcrowding and the sexual dangers that lodgers posed to the women and girls of a working-class family, they were required to report any infectious disease and quarantine, or submit to removal to an infectious disease hospital immediately, and many developments quoted the lower morbidity and mortality rates of their residents compared to the general population, tenants were frequently forbidden to wash clothes and hang them anywhere but in wash-houses provided or, more broadly, to “expose to public view” anything “unsightly” from windows; children were required to play only in playgrounds, *not* stairs or other public areas, and the playgrounds were occasionally segregated by sex. Liverpool Corporation concluded the rules of its Victoria Square development by stressing that all tenants “severally” abiding by these rules would be for their “mutual benefit.”⁹⁹ Liverpool’s inclusion of many photographs of its Bevington Street Area, like Fig. 1.2., below, show the new developments as orderly – note that this is a view of the boys’ playground, clean, pleasant, unostentatious, and quietly English. The focus of the photograph and of the development is the children: they have a safe space to play, get fresh air, and grow up to be healthy adults.

⁹⁸ City of Leeds, *The Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890: Report of the Visit of the Sub-Sanitary Committee to Salford, Manchester, Liverpool, and London* (Leeds: City of Leeds, 1899).

⁹⁹ Appendix B: Corporation of Liverpool Victoria Square. City of Leeds, *Report of the Sub-Sanitary Committee*, 99.



BEVINGTON STREET AREA.
View of Playground for Boys.—Looking from Tichfield Street and Shewing Private 15ft. Roadway.

Fig. 1.2: Playground for Boys, Bevington Street, Liverpool, 1913.¹⁰⁰

Thompson argued that the skilled and stable working classes were as much subject to the “injurious effects” as the “badly paid labourer”, and it was precisely their “steady, respectable” nature that made them most deserving of municipal cottage accommodation to fix the broken housing market, so that they could have “better and healthier accommodation than they used to have...cheaper than they used to pay.”¹⁰¹ Thompson did not advocate the ‘level up’ argument that by moving well-paid artisans out of central districts their poorer brethren would have more space and the Housing Question would be solved, but the implicit argument throughout his book was that municipal dwellings should be directed to those most able to appreciate and thrive in healthier surroundings, and that that was the strategy the state should adopt for best results. For Thompson, it was the municipal councils who could step in and build large estates, leaving philanthropic dwelling companies to build blocks of flats for labourers who could not be moved out to the suburbs.

Liverpool Corporation’s Housing Committee took the opposite view. They proudly stated that their developments were housing people who had formerly been “dispossessed” slum dwellers and would not grant applications for council housing to people who had not been living in “insanitary property.”¹⁰² In his report for the Housing Committee the Chairman argued, “It is very gratifying to notice the improvement in the habits and cleanliness of the people, as indicated by the external and internal condition of the dwellings. The changed conditions can only be fully appreciated by those who were conversant with the people and localities prior to the operations of the Committee. It is interesting to note that there is a higher moral tone, self respect is more in evidence, and a keener love of home prevails; the children are better cared for, more suitably clothed, and are placed in an environment which is bound to be productive of much moral and physical good.”¹⁰³ Statistics on falling infant

¹⁰⁰ City of Liverpool, *Artizans and Labourers Dwellings and Insanitary Property: Report of the Housing Committee* (Liverpool: Liverpool Corporation, 1913), 27.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 2-3.

¹⁰² City of Liverpool, Report of the Housing Committee in *Artizans and Labourers Dwellings*, 14.

¹⁰³ City of Liverpool, Report of the Housing Committee in *Artizans and Labourers Dwellings*, 14-15.

mortality, tuberculosis, and crime were all included to buttress Liverpool's argument that rehousing former slum dwellers was both possible and the best way forward.¹⁰⁴

The 1890 Act reoriented the housing conversation from one over the 'unfitness' of the industrial working classes held by a broad set of interested observers to a set of debates between the municipal authorities of Britain and international observers over how to use the Act to achieve as much 'fitness' among the working classes as possible for the "benefit of our national honour and repute."¹⁰⁵ Single, transient people, especially single men, were a group of people for whom special provisions had to be made, because they were the most likely to fall into disaffection and crime, and to be the cause of disaffection and crime in the communities in which they came. Municipal lodging houses, as opposed to housing estates, were intended to be a step up from, and, hopefully, a replacement for the casual lodging wards of urban workhouses to permanent accommodation for single men, and they point to a larger problem with tying housing to making people 'fit'. Was the aim to house those who were *not* fit and to make them fit, or to house and encourage those who were already fit?

Municipal lodging houses, built for transient single men, are the clearest example of the real-world divide between housing former unfit slum dwellers and the stable, healthy families idealized and institutionalized in places like Port Sunlight and Bourneville Village. These men were unattached, not necessarily in regular employment, precisely the 'vagrant' class identified as most dangerous by some commentators. While Alderman Thompson accepted that "the multiplication of Model Lodging Houses" was the "only way" to deal with the 'submerged tenth', he took the position that actually the most important work of the municipal council was building housing estates, preferably cottage estates, for the classes defined by Charles Booth as the "regular labouring class" and the "skilled labourers and artisans."¹⁰⁶ The Leeds Sub-Sanitary Committee visited a Municipal Lodging House in Salford in 1899, part of the replacement accommodation for 370 "exceedingly unhealthy cottages." They commented particularly on the Day Room where lodgers "sit, smoke, talk, read, write, and are allowed to carry on the manufacture of various small articles, provided the work creates neither nuisance or annoyance."¹⁰⁷ Concern with preventing nuisance and annoyance was pervasive; the manager was authorised to refuse admittance to anyone "who by reason of uncleanness would be a nuisance to other lodgers."¹⁰⁸ This municipal house also included a grocery shop for the lodgers only, and a large group kitchen, so that food could be purchased and cooked entirely within the development, if the lodgers wished. The lodgers were not allowed to enter the crockery store or the scullery, receiving and returning whatever dishes they required (they were rationed per resident) to the attendants employed there who did the washing up.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, although this was a lodging house for both men and women, all of the attendants were women, "the only men being employed besides the manager being an engineer and two porters." In Wales, where the coal mining boom had skewed sex ratios in Wales so much that seven of the ten most predominantly male counties in the United Kingdom were in Wales. They further added that over the last decade alone the number of colliers had increased by 65,000, leading single men to lodge with families, compounding overcrowding, illegitimate births, and low marriage rates, all exacerbated by a pervasive "lack of suitable homes."¹¹⁰ As housing provision became a reality, housing reformers confronted the fact that the very men whom they had blamed as the problem –

¹⁰⁴ City of Liverpool, Report of the Housing Committee in *Artizans and Labourers Dwellings*, 11-13.

¹⁰⁵ Cawston, *Comprehensive Scheme*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Housing of the Working Classes*, 18, 1-3.

¹⁰⁷ City of Leeds, *Report of the Sub-Sanitary Committee*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ City of Leeds, *Report of the Sub-Sanitary Committee*, 9.

¹⁰⁹ City of Leeds, *Report of the Sub-Sanitary Committee*, 7-8.

¹¹⁰ Welsh Housing Association, *Examination of the Housing Conditions*, Part II, 7-8, 25-26, 40-41.

single, transient, and strike-prone – might have to be the ones who could be helped most effectively, and that council housing might have to address the fears of disintegration of the family in another way.

Conclusion

Bad housing was thought to cause or exacerbate two broad first-order problems, and from there, reformers conjured dark visions of Britain's future. They argued, first, that the chronically high morbidity and mortality rates in the slums of the nation's great cities had created a physically degenerating underclass; and, second, that the slums were cut off from the life of the rest of the nation, and the inhabitants were exposed only to immorality, poverty, crime, and ignorance which, if left unchecked would spawn an immoral and uneducable populace inculcating the same viciousness and promiscuity in their children. Even worse, to observers, ill-health and immorality were only the first-order problems caused by poor housing. The second-order problem was the fear that the diseased, disaffected, ignorant masses were not civilized – fit, manly, appropriately cultured – as befitted their position as the most numerous class of representatives of the empire, and its most important too, as the soldiers who defended it and the workers who enriched it, while the third-order, and greatest problem was that it was a hurdle causing the imperial race to stumble.

The Housing Question and the solutions proposed linked the four nations of Britain to each other and to the world, in a global debate over what conditions were optimum for a healthy populace, and how a state could or should secure them. Observers compared and contrasted cities' progress; the Housing Committees of Leeds and Liverpool went on trips around Britain to see what their counterparts were doing, while the Housing Committee of Birmingham went to Germany to observe municipal housing there and the Chairman of the London County Council noted that the LCC's budget was approximately the same size as Belgium's.¹¹¹ The Liverpool Housing Committee noted that their city had received "numerous" deputations from "various principal towns, both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent, and also the United States, Canada and India" to look at their new council dwellings.¹¹²

The range of solutions proposed by journalists, politicians, philanthropists, and people who spanned all those categories reflected the simultaneous agreement that the working-class family was broken, and therefore un-British. Poor housing and slums raised a series of interlocking problems, and so each of the major solutions proposed addressed a different set of anxieties. The intense personal, moral education approach championed by Octavia Hill reflected an enduring distrust of large-scale state aid and the intense worry that the poor would be demoralised by state aid for which they would not have to work. However, a widespread acceptance of municipal housing, and state-provided housing in general, suggested that the growing strength of other imperial powers made large-scale state-generated improvements not only acceptable, but desirable. The size and boldness of major developments of new housing estates and blocks of flats by philanthropic developers and powerful local authorities like London, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Liverpool offered the possibility of reforming many more families than schemes that relied on close personal management of individual families. The advocates of larger and bolder schemes were more explicit about the duties of a state to promote the health of its people and through them, the empire. The frequent glances at French, German, American, or even colonial (Australian and Canadian) attempts to solve similar problems suggested the unease with which Britons

¹¹¹ E. A. Cornwall, address, *Report of the London County Council for the Year 1904-05* (London: P. S. King, 1906), xv-xvi; City of Birmingham, *Report of the Housing Committee* (Birmingham: City of Birmingham, 1906), 15-97.

¹¹² City of Liverpool, *Artizans' and Labourers Dwellings*, 17.

viewed their imperial competitors and the suspicion that serious reform of the British people would require not just reform of housing but also new instruments, from mass housing to mass education, to carry them out.

Housing and its solutions became this global conversation because of the way the Housing Question was framed as a problem of the imperial race. The housing question allowed observers to watch and shape working-class families, something they agreed was imperative because of the working classes' position as the future of Britain and its empire. That did not mean, before the First World War, that there was agreement that council housing and slum clearance were the only solutions; private philanthropy practised by the likes of Octavia Hill and Lever Bros. remained influential well into the twentieth century. But the connection between the family, the nation, and the empire was forged only in council houses, and it was that link that was reanimated and strengthened after the First World War. On the eve of the Great War, in 1911, the Welsh Housing Association argued that housing improvement would allow the Welsh "nation's men and women may fit themselves to serve the State." Once they became "great" the Welsh people "may claim their place in the family of Nations."¹¹³ The tensions – between serving the state; between becoming great; between having to *claim* a place in the family of Nations – that the Housing Question raised but could not settle became sharper and more difficult in the turbulent interwar years as the arm of the state stretched out to reach more and more Britons.

¹¹³ Welsh Housing Association, *Examination of Housing Conditions* Part I, iii.

Chapter Two

Homes for Heroes: Fitness, Fairness, and the First Expansion of Council Housing, 1918-1939

Introduction

When we first saw him, briefly, in 1911, David Lloyd George was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Liberal MP for Carnarvon Boroughs, north Wales, and a member of the Welsh Housing Association. We now find him in Wolverhampton on Saturday the 23rd of November 1918, twelve days after the Armistice had been declared, opening his Liberal-Conservative coalition government's campaign for re-election outside London.¹ One line from the speech he made that day has become famous: "What is our task? To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in." Lloyd George and the coalition won the election, and the council housing expansion they passed into law, the Housing, Town Planning &c., Act, 1919 has come to be known as the 'Homes for Heroes' program. The phrase and the program have continued to resonate: the centenary of the 1919 Act was commemorated by local councils, academics, and property developers alike, and the 'legacy of homes for heroes' is regularly invoked by policy-makers and commentators.²

Between 1918 and 1939 council housing and slum clearance law and policy showed themselves to be fungible political tools, picked up and used by a range of actors. The legacy of interwar housing law is more than one single Act or program, and it is more than the prevailing popular and scholarly understanding as *the* moment when the idea of the state as provider and guarantor of a minimum standard of living was fixed in law, policy, and public understanding.³ Rather, the creation and implementation of the major interwar housing acts (1919, 1925, 1930, 1935, 1936) set up council housing and slum clearance as ground on which questions of rights, privileges and duties of state to citizen, citizen to state would be worked out.

The questions of family, nation and empire that had produced the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 had not been settled when war broke out in 1914 and they could not be settled after the war in ways they might have been before it. Despite the professed urgency of the Housing Question, aversion to compulsive pressure in metropolitan Britain was strong,

¹ "Mr. Lloyd George on his Task," *The Times* 25 November 1918, p. 13.

² See e.g. Jules Birch, "Addison's Framework was Scrapped but its Legacy is More Important than Ever," *Inside Housing* 22 July 2019, accessed 24 March 2024 <<https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/comment/addisons-framework-was-scrapped-but-its-legacy-is-more-important-than-ever--62374>>; Laurence Miall, "This Armistice Day, Let's Salute Britain's Attempt to Build a Country 'Fit for Heroes'," *Jacobin* 11 November 2022, accessed 24 March 2024 <<https://jacobin.com/2022/11/veterans-day-britain-wwi-history-country-fit-for-heroes>>; Laura Bolden, "100 years of council housing – from homes for heroes to homes of the future," *Citylife News* 12 June 2019, accessed 24 March 2024 <<https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/citylife-news/100-years-council-housing-homes-heroes-homes-future>>; BBC Wales, "Council houses built in Wales for first time in decades," 29 May 2019, accessed 24 March 2024 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-48446234>>; Eugene Byrne, "From homes for heroes to a housing crisis: a potted history of Bristol's council housing," *The Bristol Cable* 4 April 2019 <<https://thebristolcable.org/2019/04/from-homes-for-heroes-to-a-housing-crisis-a-potted-history-of-bridstols-council-housing/>>; London Councils, "From Homes for Heroes to Today... a brief history of housing in London," n.d. [c. 2012] accessed 24 March 2012 <<https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/download/file/fid/4150>>; Claire Wrigley, Review of Homes fit for Heroes Centenary Conference. *The Architectural Historian* no. 9 (September 2019): 12; Trevor Yorke, "Homes for Heroes and the Addison Act: a History of UK Housing," *Property Investments UK* blog n.d. accessed 24 March 2024 <<https://www.propertyinvestmentsuk.co.uk/homes-for-heroes/>>.

³ See especially Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

leaving the earliest housing acts (1890-1909) without many teeth.⁴ That was the first thing to change after the Great War. Christopher Addison, first Minister of Health and sponsor of the Bill that became the 1919 Housing Act, called its powers “drastic” and the possibilities contained within it “enormous.”⁵ Unprecedented duties were laid on local authorities: they were obliged *both* to survey their districts for housing need *and* to commence slum clearance and estate construction schemes for its amelioration. But they were also given unprecedented state support, most obviously in the form of subsidies, but also in terms of sample schema, blueprints, technical advice, and comprehensive guidance and oversight from the newly-created Ministry of Health.⁶ When all adult Britons were enfranchised, when all of them had made great personal sacrifices to keep the empire together, and when the Britons most affected by council housing and slum clearance were offering critiques showing they did not necessarily accept their role as backbone of present and future empire, the Housing Question had to be approached and answered differently.

It is when council housing and slum clearance expanded in the interwar period that we are able to see that it was not only constituted by, but functioned through, the binaries of English/non-English, known/stranger, civilized/uncivilized. These were categories formed and derived through Britain’s imperial experience, which themselves rested on the binary opposition at the heart of the European imperial project, white/black. Postcolonial theorists, particularly Paul Gilroy, made it clear that Englishness is inseparable from whiteness – Englishness *is* whiteness – but what the history of council housing allows us to see is how contingent, changeable, and slippery whiteness has been.⁷ The inhabitants of London’s slums were the dark strangers at the heart of the Empire, and council housing and slum clearance was to turn them into known and knowable Englishmen and -women who would go on to become ‘fit’ members of the ‘imperial race.’

In the two decades between the wars the contests over the law and policy of council housing were places where new understandings of social citizenship in the democratic metropole of an undemocratic empire were tested. Small but growing groups of residents and associated activists worked with and against the politicians and policy-makers of Westminster, Whitehall, and the town halls of Britain’s big cities to ask what council housing was for, who it was for, and how it could achieve the purposes set for it. What the ‘imperial race’ was, and how the families of working-class Britons could join it were reconfigured in the light of universal suffrage and the growing instability of the empire. Similarly, the definition of ‘housing need’, who could be said to experience it, and what remedies should be taken were restated in light of a fully enfranchised working class, regional shifts in Britain’s economy, and the privations of the Great Depression.

⁴ Jim Tomlinson, *Managing the Economy, Managing the People: Narratives of Economic Life in Britain from Beveridge to Brexit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

⁵ 116 Parl. Deb. H. C. (5th ser.) (1919) col. 1178; James E. Cronin, *The Politics of State Expansion: War, State and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1991); M. J. Daunton, “Payment and Participation: Welfare and State-Formation in Britain, 1900-1951,” *Past and Present* 150, no. 1 (1996): 169-216. Cronin and Daunton offer contrasting arguments for the growth of state power but both demonstrate in different ways how it increased after the First World War.

⁶ Housing, Town Planning &c., Act, 1919, 9 & 10. Geo. 5, c. 35; Ministry of Health Act, 1919, 9 & 10 Geo. 5, c. 21.

⁷ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* 2nd ed. (1998. London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 38-39; Robbie Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018).

Part I.i: Council Housing and the Imperial Race

Council housing was described by Lloyd George and other parliamentarians as payment of “the blood value of the War” to the “millions of men, who came from humble homes” who “fought, bled and died for us.”⁸ From 1918 on, council housing and slum clearance were intended to perform a double role: recompense to men who had proved that they were fit members of the imperial race, literally with their blood, ensuring that there was no backsliding of that imperial race after the war. Construing council housing as payment of a blood debt owed to the British workingmen who had laid “their lives on the altar of their country” made explicit the fact that council housing was the home of the imperial race.⁹ At the same time, Lloyd George and others could not forget the “appalling waste of human material,” by which they did not mean those killed or maimed in the war, but the hundreds of thousands of men rejected by the armed forces as physically unfit.¹⁰ Lloyd George concluded his comments on housing by combining those two themes: “Slums are not fit homes for the men who have won this war or for their children. They are not fit nurseries for the children who are to make an Imperial race.”¹¹

Council housing’s first iteration as two national programs, England and Wales, and Scotland, was thus designed and framed as the site for the reproduction of a ‘fit’ imperial race. But just as different territories make up an empire, so was the ‘imperial race’ an aggregate. Linda Colley argued in *Britons*, “Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time.”¹² She saw a British identity “superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other,” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In short, she argues that the inhabitants of Britain came to understand themselves as bearers of a distinctive new national identity, Britishness, *as well as* seeing themselves as Englishmen, Scotsmen, Yorkshiremen and so on.¹³ In council housing law and policy a century later we see not the demotic Britishness that Colley identified in the early nineteenth century, but a state-backed extension of an *imperial* British identity into people’s homes and lives – analogous to the promotion of Empire Day, which was in fact instituted in Britain by Lord Brabazon, whom we saw in the previous chapter, airing his concerns over the “decay of bodily strength in towns” and “degeneration of the race.”¹⁴ But because it was an imperial identity, it was, as Lloyd George described it a “national concern” of the constituent ‘races’ of Britain, England, Scotland, and Wales. The war had showed that the ‘imperial race’ was in fact more capacious than had previously been assumed, as millions of men whose ‘humble homes’ in the slums had marked them as physically and mentally unfit nevertheless fought as bravely the rest of the imperial armed forces – and that they came from all over Britain: England, Scotland, and Wales.

Council housing after the First World War was a version of an Andersonian project of ‘official imperial nationalism.’¹⁵ Council housing was to continue the centuries-long process of

⁸ 116 Parl. Deb. H. C. (5th ser.) (1919) col. 1173, 1174; “Mr. Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times* 25 November 1918, p. 13.

⁹ “Mr. Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times* 25 November 1918, p. 13.

¹⁰ “Mr. Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times* 25 November 1918, p. 13; Hansard; Tudor Walters; various.

¹¹ “Mr. Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times* 25 November 1918, p. 13.

¹² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 2003), 6.

¹³ Colley, *Britons*, 6-7.

¹⁴ Brabazon, “Decay of Bodily Strength in Towns,” *The Nineteenth Century* 123 (1887): 674. Jim English, “Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958,” *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006): 247-76. See ch. 1.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* rev. ed. (1983. London: Verso, 2016), 85-86.

weaving together the three national identities of Britons into an all-encompassing imperial one, as council housing would become the homes of Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen who *together* made up the imperial race of Britons. Solicitor, former councillor of the London County Council and, at time of writing Conservative MP for Woolwich West, Kingsley Wood argued in *The Law and Practice with Regard to Housing in England and Wales* that the 1919 Act tackled the “threefold” aspects of the ‘housing question:’ the problem of new houses; the problem of slum clearance; and town planning for the future.”¹⁶ The decision to subsidise local authority development, according to Wood and to Christopher Addison, first Minister of Health, sponsor of the 1919 Act, and author of the preface to Wood’s book, turned a local question into an imperial one. The 1919 Act’s approach to the housing question knitted together the whole of England and Wales, and Scotland, *and* past – unfit houses – present – the housing shortage following the war – and future – replanning urban life – for the good of the whole nation and thus the empire.¹⁷ A popular, book-length treatise by Captain Richard Reiss, published in 1919 and entitled *The Home I Want*, featured a cover that has become famous.¹⁸

¹⁶ Kingsley Wood, *The Law and Practice with regard to Housing in England and Wales* (London: H. Frowde, Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 10. Wood became Minister of Health in the National Government of Stanley Baldwin in 1935 and held that post until the reshuffle of May 1938 under Neville Chamberlain.

¹⁷ Wood, *Law and Practice*, 10.

¹⁸ Richard Reiss, *The Home I Want* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), cover. The line ‘you cannot get an A1 population out of C3 homes,’ was quoted by the fictional Earl of Grantham on the BBC television show *Downton Abbey* (season 5 episode 6, aired 26 October, 2014) and the cover of Reiss’s book was then retweeted by Labour Councillor for Wandsworth Borough Council, Simon Hogg, in 2014. <<https://twitter.com/cllrsimonhogg/status/526481504906805249>>.

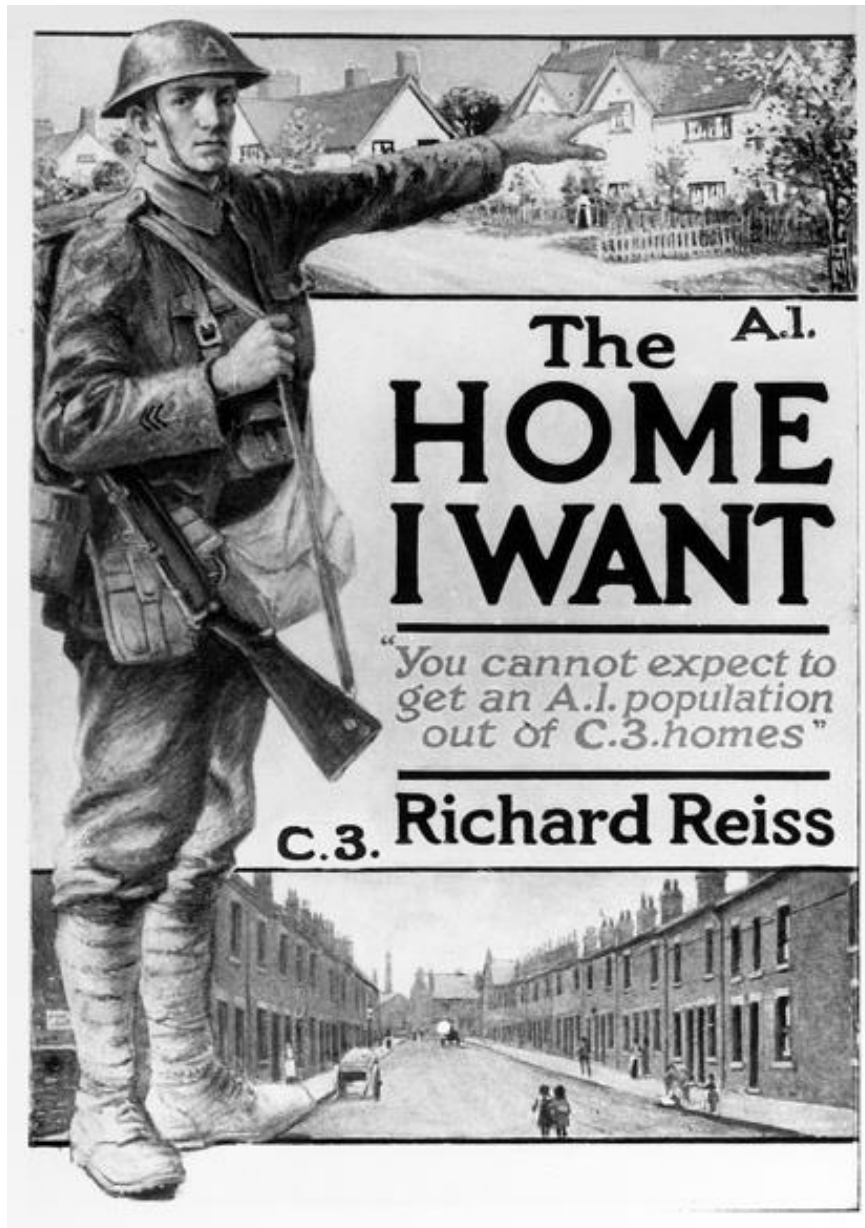


Fig. 2.1: *The Home I Want*, by Richard Reiss, 1919.

The army jargon, “You cannot expect to get an A.1. population out of C.3 homes,” and the contrast between grimy terraces on a treeless street, nowhere for children to play but the road, and whitewashed cottages in gardens. Past, present, and future of local, national, and imperial also appeared in the example of a tenant selection scheme Wood included as a model, that of Leeds. According to Wood, Leeds ranked housing applicants in the following order:

- (1) Men who have served in HM Forces, wives and mothers of men serving, or widows or mothers and children of deceased soldiers and sailors;
- (2) families who have outgrown their accommodation or are residing in apartments;
- (3) newly-married couples not at

present occupying houses; (4) persons under notices to quit owing to the property having been sold; (5) former Leeds residents who have had to give up houses during the war (other than service or ex-servicemen); (6) persons living out of Leeds but employed within the city; (7) persons desiring a change; and (8) people desiring to live in the city but now residing outside.¹⁹

As homes for the constituent members of the imperial race, the ‘housing problem’ was understood as a ‘national’ one, the homes that would produce the “modern, literate, culturally standardized population,” required by an imperial industrial empire.²⁰ Wood, again, wrote, “England is not alone in this matter. All over the world similar questions are facing the Governments of other nations. To-day this country is, as a matter of fact, further advanced with its schemes than any other country in the world.”²¹ Here ‘England’ functions as *both* a specific, since the housing law of Scotland, Ireland, and, from 1924, Northern Ireland, was not the same and required its own reference books, *and* a nation on a par with other national entities. *Housing*, a fortnightly journal published by the Ministry of Health for local authorities between 1919 and 1921, similarly included features on different authorities’ schemes but also on the ‘housing problem’ as it appeared around the empire or in comparable (industrial, white) nations.²² The sentiment was the same in Scotland. In 1935, the Secretary of State for Scotland, Godfrey Collins, wrote that the report of the Scottish Department of Health’s trip to examine housing schemes in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and France, “will...prove of great interest to all who are anxious that State-assisted houses in Scotland should reflect in a worthy manner those national aspirations for social advancement.”²³ He further argued that “the social and cultural benefits” from rehousing “so large a proportion of our countrymen” in aesthetically pleasing estates, rather than functional but unattractive suburbs, “are at least as important as the immediate benefits to health and comfort.”²⁴ Like Wood, and Lloyd George before them, Collins understood Scotland and the Scots as a nation in its own right, able to go on international tours and to bring back knowledge to be used for *Scottish* ‘national aspirations.’

The London County Council’s Housing Department also went on a tour of the continent in the mid-1930s. The report of the deputation’s research into municipal housing schemes in France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia was written by Lewis Silkin, then chairman of the LCC’s housing and public health committee, future Minister of

¹⁹ Wood, *Law and Practice*, 30.

²⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 46.

²¹ Wood, *Law and Practice*, 10.

²² On international comparisons see e.g. “Housing in Germany,” *Housing* 1 no. 1 (1919): 14; “Publications: The Housing Problem in Germany,” *Housing* (1919): 1 no. 9 124; “The Housing Problem in Other Countries,” *Housing* 1 no. 13 (1920): 176-180 and its sister article, “Housing in Other Countries,” *Housing* 2 no. 41 (1921): 217-22; “British Empire Timber Exhibition,” *Housing* 1 no. 26 (1920): 357; “Reconstruction in France,” *Housing* 2 no. 34 (1920): 103; “Housing in Holland,” 2 no. 34 (1920): 111. On local case studies see e.g. “Mr Lloyd George and Housing in North Wales,” *Housing* 2 no. 34 (1920): 103; B. J. S., “The Case for Optimism,” *Housing* 2 no. 35 (1920): 117; “The Norwich Housing Scheme,” *Housing* 2 no. 35 (1920): 133; G. M. H., “Towards a National Survey,” *Housing* 2 no. 36 (1920): 137-39, continued 2 no. 41 (1921): 214-15, 2 no. 42 (1921): 225-27, 2 no. 43 (1921): 242-43, 2 no. 44 (1921): 256; “Acton Housing Scheme,” *Housing* 2 no. 36 (1920): 142-45; “Report of the South Wales Regional Survey Committee,” *Housing* 2 no. 44 (1921): 255; J. Irvine, “Manchester’s Repairs,” *Housing* 2 no. 46 (1921): 287. Vol. 2 no. 46 was the last issue published.

²³ Godfrey Collins, foreword to *Working-Class Housing on the Continent: Report* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1935), 6.

²⁴ Collins, foreword to *Working-Class Housing*, 5.

Town and Country Planning under Clement Attlee. His consideration of the variations in practice he observed, the strengths and weaknesses of schemes in numerous cities, exemplifies the way in which municipal housing was understood as a tool to be adapted to the cultural needs and practices its managers deemed best for the working classes of their respective cities. Regarding a development in Prague, Silkin wrote that he and his companions “observed generally that the accommodation provided was based on a larger number of persons per room than is the case in London;” their hosts explained that their designs did not include much bedroom space because, “the members of a family usually preferred to crowd together for sleeping.”²⁵ Silkin continued, “It appeared, however, that English conceptions of accommodation, both as to extent and sex separation, are in the process of adoption in many continental towns, though in most of them the present practice falls far short of English ideas and standards.” Silkin added that his hosts in Prague agreed that although risking overcrowding by truckling to the preferences of working-class Praguers was “unsatisfactory,” those preferences were real and so were the constraints of money and material that forced the council to make sacrifices.²⁶ Overcrowding was by definition un-English (“English conceptions”); the laxer attitude adopted by housing managers in Prague served to underline the difference and superiority of the English to their continental neighbours.

Policy-makers understood municipal housing estates as the sites to build an organic, wholesome, national community. Continental designs and priorities differed from those of the LCC, some for the better, in some for the worse, and some that were just *different*, as befitted a different kind of organic community. In Britain, framing the housing question as an imperial race led, according to Silkin, to a much greater concentration on ‘decency’ and sex separation, which were thought to be markers of Englishness, than it had on the continent. Instead, the Danes, Dutch, Germans, Austrians, French, and Czechoslovaks had chosen different problems to solve, and thus implemented solutions appreciably different from “English practice.”²⁷ Silkin appreciated this, and was consequently impressed by Danish siting and layout of estates for maximum light, of the attention to detail shown in design and decoration in Denmark and the Netherlands, and to the provision of community centres, kindergartens, schools, libraries, and welfare and medical offices for these new housing estates in Austria, which “appears to be in a state of evolution...in some towns the authorities have advanced farther along these lines than in London.”²⁸ All the different issues that could be addressed by working-class housing were summed up by Silkin’s conclusion, “While continental housing practice up to the present appears to have provided a lower standard of accommodation, as regards the number of persons per room, than is the case in London, it must be acknowledged that dwellings provided for the working classes on the Continent during recent years have in some respects more amenities for family life.”²⁹ In Silkin’s report we see again how the housing question was many different questions bound together; the solutions proposed and adopted determined by the political, cultural, social and economic context in which they were developed.

²⁵ London County Council, *Working-Class Housing on the Continent and the Application of Continental Ideas to the Housing Problem in the County of London* (London: London County Council, 1936), 16.

²⁶ LCC, *Working-Class Housing on the Continent*, 16.

²⁷ LCC, *Working-Class Housing on the Continent*, 17, 19. The LCC team called the lack of provision of ovens in Copenhagen and Stockholm flats “a strange variation on English practice” (17); Continental authorities “expressed surprise” at the LCC not turning basements into storage space for tenants, and bathrooms in Holland were described as “contrary to English custom” (19).

²⁸ LCC, *Working-Class Housing on the Continent*, 23.

²⁹ LCC, *Working-Class Housing on the Continent*, 25.

The duty to build new houses for those in need where the market had failed took on new importance when those people were now full citizens. Arthur Greenwood, Minister of Health between 1929 and 1931, stressed that the question of housing went beyond “bricks and mortar” to “proper conditions of life for a community which deserves it. I am not against the pig sty for the pig. I am against the hovel and the pig sty for human beings, who, whether they like it or not, have cast upon them the responsibilities of citizenship.”³⁰ This view was expressed even more strongly by Lady Marjory Allen of Hurtwood, who at the time of the passage of the Housing Act, 1930, was a landscape architect, and married to iconoclastic Labour peer Clifford Allen.³¹ In an undated draft of an article which internal evidence suggests was for the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects* (1934) she took slum clearance as her subject. She wrote, “What are we aiming to achieve? Presumably it is to make decent and happy citizens,” and it is worth noting that this was written around only six years after Britain had achieved universal adult suffrage. She continued, “This is not the place to discuss at length what we mean by a decent citizen, but we all know the kind of neighbours amongst whom we should like to move.” Allen offered her own definition, which centred on the idea of being “a good member of his team, whether that team be his town, his school or his home,” and argued that this required consideration and imagination.³² This short passage is redolent of the tensions surfacing in Britain in the interwar period. Beginning a definition with *we all know*, setting up the idea of a *neighbour* as a proxy for *citizen* underscores the extent to which the slum clearance program of the 1930s was grappling with the question of what to do with a mass of citizens (“the herding together of vast numbers of people,”) who might not be ‘team players’ at all. Rather, this ‘vast number of people’ did not know the mores and behaviours that made one a good neighbour, a good team player, a good citizen, at least according to the bourgeoisie, like Allen, who set that ‘high’ culture.³³ Allen wrote, “To my mind the peril of the new houses that are being built under many housing schemes is that they are mostly unrelated to home life inside and cultural life outside” and in support of her argument she quoted a “working mother” from Liverpool who had been rehoused from the inner city to a suburban estate:

There are no shops near or Market of a Saturday night where we can get cheap food. I can’t afford bus fares, and I’ve had to sell the pram for rent. There’s no one near to lend me a hand with the children so as I can earn a bit, cleaning and washing. I tell you we wish we were back in what you people call the Slums a thousand times a day.³⁴

³⁰ 237 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1930) col. 1801.

³¹ After the Second World War Allen went on to become a campaigner for children’s rights and improving early childhood education, in which capacity she was especially influential in advocating adventure playgrounds and accessibility for disabled children. In the 1930s, though, we see the germs of all of those activities as she campaigned for gardens and thoughtful town planning in the slum clearance program of the 1930s. Hal Moggridge, “Allen [*née* Gill], Marjory, Lady Allen of Hurtwood (1897-1976),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, <https://doi-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/61348>).

³² Papers of Marjory Allen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, Talks by Lady Allen on slum clearance and improvement, undated, ‘ILA journal’, [c. 1930-1935], 1, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (hereafter MRC)/MSS.121/HO/7/1/26/2.

³³ To borrow from Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

³⁴ Papers of Marjory Allen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, Talks by Lady Allen on slum clearance and improvement, undated [c. 1930-1935], ‘ILA journal’, 2-3, MRC/MSS.121/HO/7/1/26/2.

To her credit, and perhaps of necessity, as class tensions sharpened, Allen recognised that what she did indeed calls slums had a social and cultural life that *could* allow for neighbourly citizenship. “Whitechapel has its great broad streets of life and fun. It is a neighbourly place. Its markets, street barrows, flare lights, public houses and moving traffic all give it a romantic interest for those who live there, however grim and hateful it is in other ways.”³⁵ In other words, the people of the slums *were* redeemable; if the new housing estates were designed properly to foster organic cultural and social life of their respective nations.

Part I.ii: Council Housing and Englishness

If council housing at the imperial level was about the reproduction of the white constituent races who together made up the imperial race of the British Empire, at the national level it was understood as the means to inculcate and reproduce Englishness, Scottishness, and Welshness. But the resources and discussion devoted to Englishness, Scottishness, and Welshness by the politicians and policy-makers were not equal. Council housing as the means to inculcate and reproduce Englishness was the dominant mode in which council housing law and policy were made. Law for England, Scotland, and Wales were all made in London and policy for England and Wales was too. Englishmen (and some women) outnumbered Scots and Welsh in Parliament, the civil service, and the social reform movements that were influential in shaping housing law and policy in London *and* Edinburgh.

The inequality reflects, too, the distribution of population and urban and industrial development between the three nations. Despite the poverty of Welsh valleys and the notoriety of Glasgow’s tenements, the disparities in population of the three nations meant that the slums of England’s conurbations dwarfed those of Wales and Scotland.³⁶ According to the 1931 census showed that England’s population was more than seven times larger than that of Scotland and more than *fourteen* times larger than that of Wales; similarly, a third of the population of England and Wales lived in Greater London.³⁷ Although both Scotland and Wales, poorer than England, had higher rates of overcrowding, the difference in population was such that the census of 1931 showed that more than one million *families* were living in overcrowded conditions in England, compared to just under 65,000 families in Wales, or slightly more than one and a half million *people* in Scotland.³⁸

Following the Housing Act, 1930, the local authorities of England and Wales had proposed 1,414 slum clearance schemes requiring the rehousing of 1,242,182 people in the next

³⁵ Papers of Marjory Allen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, Talks by Lady Allen on slum clearance and improvement, undated [c. 1930-1935], ‘ILA journal’, 2-3, MRC/MSS.121/HO/7/1/26/2.

³⁶ On Scotland see *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban*, 1917, Cd. 8731. On Wales see *First Report of the Commissioner for the Special Areas (England and Wales)*, 1935, Cmd. 4957.

³⁷ The 1931 census found that the population of England was 37,354,917, that of Wales, 2,593,014, and Scotland 4,842,554. John Bartholomew, *The Survey Gazetteer of the British Isles* (Edinburgh: John Bartholomew & Son, 1932), x; 1931 Census of Scotland, *Preliminary Report on the Fourteenth Census of Scotland*, Part II: General Summary. From “A Vision of Britain Through Time,” accessed May 6, 2024 <<https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/S1931PRE/3>>.

³⁸ *Census of England and Wales 1931: Housing: Reports and Tables* (London: HMSO, 1935), Table 12, p. 35; Department of Health for Scotland, *Sixth Annual Report for 1934*, 1935, Cmd. 4837, 24. Overcrowding standards were not fixed at this point hence why the census and the government departments concerned with housing were able to use different ones.

four years.³⁹ Although *Particulars of Slum Clearance*, the annual reports presented to Parliament by the Ministry of Health, were presented in such a way as to stress the England-and-Wales-wide effects of the program, they in fact highlighted the concentration of slums in English urban centres. Wales's three County Boroughs (Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport) estimated in 1933 that their slum clearance programs would displace and rehouse 3,364 people, while, for example, the LCC and borough councils of London were estimating displacement and rehousing for 265,000 people, or Leeds 111,000. Even smaller local government areas on the outskirts of England's conurbations were proposing clearance areas covering thousands of people, like Stockton-on-Tees (4,888 people), Blyth (5,013), and Hartlepool (1,299) in the north-east around Newcastle, Keighley (2,856), west Yorkshire and Colne, Lancashire (2,135).⁴⁰ By contrast, Scotland's local authorities reported that only 60,773 houses would be needed to replace unfit housing in the whole country between 1934 and 1938. This low figure, the Scottish Department of Health concluded, was due to the Scottish tradition of building in stone, sometimes even granite, so the tenements in the cities and the cottages in the countryside retained "strength and stability" unlike their counterparts in England.⁴¹ Research in the mid-1930s by the Central Housing Advisory Committee (CHAC) found that the amount of house building for the working classes, both by councils and by private enterprise was overwhelmingly in London and the home counties and the industrial north, Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire.⁴² Of the fifty administrative counties in England, only the LCC, Essex, Kent, and Surrey in the south-east, Staffordshire and Warwickshire in the west midlands, and Cheshire in the north-west averaged over 5,000 houses per six month period; only Middlesex, Lancashire, and the West Riding averaged over 10,000. Building in Wales and rural England, on the other hand, was "negligible," and even in Scotland, which was making "specially gratifying" progress on condemning its unfit housing was "still slow" on larger town planning schemes that planners agreed it needed.⁴³ Among the thirteen counties of Wales, only Flintshire, on the border of industrial Cheshire in the north, and Glamorganshire, the county of Cardiff and the industrial south, averaged more than 500 houses per six months.⁴⁴

The predominance of council housing as the site to produce Englishness was not only a function of the numbers, however. The Englishness of council housing derived from England, and Englishmen's position at the top of the imperial political, economic, and cultural hierarchy.⁴⁵ By the end of the First World War the imperial identity, which we might call *British*, was a composite of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and overseas (Australia, New Zealand, Canada) white identities.⁴⁶ Of all of these, Englishness was understood as the most important and most powerful among the constituent races of Britons who made up the 'imperial race,' to the extent

³⁹ Ministry of Health, *Housing Act, 1930: Particulars of Slum Clearance Programmes Furnished by Local Authorities*, 1934, Cmd. 4535, 3.

⁴⁰ Cmd. 4535, 4-14.

⁴¹ Department of Health for Scotland, *Report of the Scottish Departmental Committee on Housing*, 1933, Cmd. 4469, 11-12. See also Martin Dauntton, *House and Home in Victorian Britain: Working-Class Housing, 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 64-71, 176-78 as to why Scotland developed tenement housing and England did not.

⁴² Central Housing Advisory Committee (hereafter CHAC), "Forecast of Housebuilding," Paper P.3, 2, The National Archives (hereafter TNA)/HLG 37/41.

⁴³ Department of Health for Scotland, *Seventh Annual Report for 1935, 1936*, Cmd. 5123, 13. See also Appendix II, pp. 154, 156.

⁴⁴ CHAC, "Forecast of Housebuilding," Paper P.3, 3, TNA/HLG 37/41.

⁴⁵ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 37.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 93-94.

that it could and did blot out the others.⁴⁷ In *Landscape and Englishness*, David Matless suggests that the very presence of an *imperial* identity, Britishness, allowed Englishness to be considered separately in the metropolitan context. Of the group of writers and activists from the interwar period who are the focus of *Landscape and Englishness*, Matless writes, “With few exceptions, when these writers discuss English landscape they generally mean England and not Britain,” because of the fluidity of the ‘imperial race’ that encompassed different races of Britons. Matless continues, “When, however, discussion moves abroad, Englishness and Britishness become almost interchangeable, especially when the subject is the Empire.”⁴⁸ Thus, in July 1919 the first Minister of Health, Christopher Addison, could write in the opening editorial of the Ministry’s new journal, *Housing*, that it was intended to be an aid for “all of us” whilst meaning only England and Wales.⁴⁹



Fig. 2.2: *Housing* masthead, 1919-21.

Befitting its status as the official organ of the new housing program, *Housing* had an elaborate masthead (fig. 2.2) that evoked the new England that would arise upon the solution of the ‘housing problem’: orderly, harmonious, a balance struck between nature and the built environment, and the entire scene well-managed by the government on top of the hill. At the top was the royal coat of arms; a parchment scroll ran across the bottom with the imprint of the Ministry of Health Housing Department. In between the coat of arms and the scroll was a drawing of a wide boulevard running through an orderly, gridded town to a domed building. The domed building could be a city hall, customs house, or a church, but it in any case it evokes the political, legal, and cultural establishment watching over the town. A town laid out on a grid with

⁴⁷ Matless, *Landscape*, 38; Alun Howkins, “The Discovery of Rural England,” in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* ed. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 65.

⁴⁸ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 38.

⁴⁹ C. Addison, “Housing and Peace: A Message from the Minister of Health,” *Housing* 1 no. 1 (1919): 1. Scotland had its own Housing Act but its Department of Health did not produce its own equivalent of *Housing*.

a central vista leading to a neo-classical building could seem American or Parisian, so the artist was careful to evoke a sense of Englishness in other ways. Flanking the central urban scene are impressions of woods and fields, quintessential English countryside, and the sun, shining behind the dome, was a reminder of the empire on which the sun never set. Literary critic Paul Alpers argues in *What is Pastoral?* that the pastoral was not primarily a landscape, but a *relationship* between people in “a harmonious relationship to the natural setting which they share.” The landscape of a representative pastoral poem “neither dominates the herdsmen nor is unduly responsive to them, but, in its parallel activity, is an appropriate setting for human song.”⁵⁰ Alpers further argues that the shepherds, and, later, shepherdesses of the pastoral mode “are felt to be representative of some or all of other men and/or women.”⁵¹ As the *Housing* masthead suggested, the new estates would awaken a sense of contemporary Englishness, or Scottishness, or Welshness, combining pastoral and modernist modes; the homes would govern and shape the families within them. Over time, the estates would become the homes of a reconstituted, productive, English, or Scottish, or Welsh community, and the future of the imperial race would be assured.

The house, its garden, and the estate were accordingly the mechanism where the English people would be placed to recover a harmonious relationship to themselves, their cities, England, Britain, and the empire. Arthur Greenwood, the Minister of Health who sponsored the 1930 Housing Act introduced it to the House of Commons by arguing that as well as being his castle, “The Englishman’s home is the nursery of personal and civic virtues; it is the institution of the whole of us, which, in its intimate day by day life, shapes the destinies of our people.”⁵² The council home and the estate in which it was place was designed in minute detail to make the families who called it home healthy, decorous, respectful, and orderly members of English society. The Local Government Board, which became the Ministry of Health in 1919, published a *Manual on the Preparation of State-Aided Housing Schemes* in which it urged the adoption of the as-close-to-traditional-as-possible two-storey cottage-type house as widely as possible. The house would contain all the amenities that enabled comfortable, clean living (“living-room, scullery, larder, fuel store, w.c., bath in separate chamber, and three bedrooms”) that was rooted in cosy domesticity. Living rooms the *Manual* explained should “be arranged with as few doors as practicable, which should be placed so that they will not interfere with the comfort and convenience of those occupying the space about window and fire.”⁵³

As well as living in houses designed to encourage or discourage certain forms of behaviour, tenants were watched – council estates were described in census records as ‘controlled’ housing – to make sure they conformed. Just as the tenants of Octavia Hill had only been awarded ‘improvements’ in their homes once they had proved themselves to be solvent, orderly, and clean, council tenants gained an approximation of the ‘Englishman’s home is his castle,’ in their cottage estates, but without the privacy and freedom afforded to those whose citizenship did not have a question mark over their heads. The *Tenants Handbook* for the

⁵⁰ Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23-24.

⁵¹ Alpers, *Pastoral*, 26.

⁵² 237 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1930) col. 1801.

⁵³ Memorandum: house accommodation, item 38(a), (b), Local Government Board, *Manual on the Preparation of State-Aided Housing Schemes* (London: HMSO, 1919), 8, TNA/HLG 31/3. *The Sphere* noted that these plans had been in preparation since 1917, when the Local Government Board called for submissions from the Royal Institute of British Architects. “The Housing Question: Some of the Premium Cottage Designs,” *The Sphere* 76 no. 992 (1919): 78. Memorandum: house accommodation, item 39, *Manual on State-Aided Housing Schemes*, 9, TNA/HLG 31/3.

Bellingham and Downham estates of the LCC warned tenants that they should be able and willing to ‘co-operate’ with the Council “in maintaining and improving the amenities of Bellingham and Downham” and they were expected to live orderly, quiet, lives in which they cared for their community.⁵⁴ To make good on the state’s investment, council tenants were strictly enjoined to practise certain kinds of behaviour and to give up others. No one in receipt of poor relief was eligible to apply for a tenancy, and the separation of social from commercial life was strictly enjoined. Tenants were forbidden to sublet, to use their premises to carry on or store the implements of “any trade or business”, or to “Expose in the premises or any part thereof any goods or materials for sale or hire.” Tenants were also made aware that they could only behave in certain ways in their homes; in some cases as a Condition of Tenancy – at Bellingham and Downham they were required only to hang pictures on picture rails, using hooks provided by the council – and sometimes as non-binding ‘Advice.’⁵⁵ Tenants were told not to pull the chains of toilets with a jerk, that they should clean sinks with boiling soda water “at frequent intervals”, and that “Garden gates should not be slammed in a careless manner. Children should be instructed not to swing on them.”⁵⁶ Discussing the front and back doors of cottages, an article in *Housing*, entitled “Some Notes,” suggested that “on the rare occasions when any special visitors are expected, who insist on coming to the front door, care would be taken to have the room...in a fit condition to receive the fire of prying eyes”.⁵⁷

The public spaces of the estate were equally carefully controlled. At Bellingham the LCC refused applications from two men wanting to erect temporary stalls, one to sell sweets, the other a disabled soldier who wanted to sell tobacco and cigarettes to avoid having to accept government relief, and one from a retiring sergeant-major who wanted to start a “Fish Restaurant,” but they accepted applications from two clothiers and a chemist.⁵⁸ the LCC Housing Estates Manager wrote back, “With reference to your letter...I have to inform you that the Council is not erecting any shops on the Bellingham Estate and, in any case, it is not the practice of the Council to allow Fried Fish businesses to be carried on at its Estates.”⁵⁹ Stable, settled ‘useful’ businesses were encouraged to join the Bellingham community, any businesses that smacked of the louche or the transient were denied a place.

Emphasising the pastoral connection between *all* organic life, the green spaces of the estates, both tenants’ gardens and the public greens, were symbols of England and Englishness. The 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act had made gardens a defining feature of a working-class cottage, and *The Home I Want*’s contrast between black, treeless slums and cottage estates showed that green spaces, together with the air of peace and tranquillity they

⁵⁴ Valuation, Estates & Housing Department, foreword to *Bellingham & Downham Tenants’ Handbook* (London: London County Council, 1934). London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA)/LCC/HSG/GEN/03/012.

⁵⁵ Valuation &c. Department, *Handbook*, 13, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/03/012.

⁵⁶ Valuation &c. Department, *Handbook*, 15, 16, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/03/012.

⁵⁷ “Some Notes on the House Plans in the Ministry of Health’s Manual,” *Housing* 1 no. 1 (1919): 6. See also David Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 82-84.

⁵⁸ Clothes shop: Miss K. Wenham LCC Housing Estates Manager, August 1922, Henry C. Smith to LCC Housing Estates Manager, 14 August, 1922; chemist: Mr E. P. D. Bush to LCC Housing Estates Manager, 15 August, 1922; sweets stall: Mr H. Martin to LCC Housing Estates Manager, April 1922; temporary tobacco stall: Mr J. W. Pollard to LCC Housing Estates Manager, 6 June 1922; fish restaurant: Mr. B. S. M. Burdall to LCC Housing Estates Manager, January 1923, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/01/030.

⁵⁹ LCC Housing Estates Manager to Mr. B. S. M. Burdall, 26 January 1923, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/01/030. See also John Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

suggested was integral to the idea of home of the 1919 Act.⁶⁰ “Neglect of the garden spoils the appearance of any house,” begins the Gardening Notes section of the Bellingham and Downham *Tenants Handbook*, “It is of special importance that the front garden should be neat and tidy throughout the year.”⁶¹ Social reformers of all ideological stripes had cast the inhabitants of slums as foreign, un-English, bastard children of the Industrial Revolution. Council estates were to be modern-day Anglo-Saxon hundreds, quite literally.⁶² The land that became the LCC’s Bellingham estate in Lewisham, south London had once been part of the manor of Alfred the Great, so the LCC Architects’ Department proposed that the streets on the estate be given names associated with him, like ‘Elfrida’ and ‘Arnulf,’ and with the medieval history of Lewisham. The main street of the development was, and still is, named King Alfred Avenue.⁶³ John Foot, Chief Sanitary Inspector of Bethnal Green argued against the LCC’s proposal to build five-storey blocks of flats on the cleared land in Bethnal Green because they “savoured of barracks and all that was opposed to what an Englishman liked to regard as home.”⁶⁴ The pages of *Housing* too were full of ideas for green spaces, and during the development of Bellingham, the LCC’s Chief Architect, George Topham Forrest wrote to the Director of Housing to urge that planting be started as quickly as possible, otherwise “the whole layout will assume a bleak and utilitarian outlook.”⁶⁵ At Bellingham, too, the name ‘Bellingham Gardens’ for the central green was rejected by the LCC’s Housing Committee in favour of the less formal, more bucolic ‘Bellingham Green.’⁶⁶ Similarly, in Brady Street, Bethnal Green Borough Council fought hard for the cleared site to be made into something approaching a cottage estate, with no blocks of flats higher than three storeys, and one portion of the site to have actual cottages.⁶⁷ The Mayor, J. J. Vaughan, argued that turning a piece of land known as the disused Jewish Burial Ground into a park would make a “healthy resort” for the people, and self-contained cottages were the “ideal type of dwelling.” When confronted with the fact that this would cost an estimated at £20 more

⁶⁰ “[L]odging houses for the working classes” were defined as “separate houses or cottages for the working classes, whether containing one or several tenements”, and ‘cottage’ received further definition in that a cottage may “include a garden of not more than *half an acre, provided that the estimated annual value of such garden shall not exceed three pounds.*” Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, s. 50.

⁶¹ Valuation &c. Department, *Handbook*, 18, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/03/012.

⁶² Richard Weight argues that “like many Edwardian radicals, he [Silkin] was influenced by Robert Blatchford, whose *Merrie England* celebrated a pre-industrial nation of co-operative village communities.” See Weight, “Silkin, Lewis, first Baron Silkin (1889-1972),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, <https://doi-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/31684>).

⁶³ Memorandum from G. F. Palmer to E. H. Parkes, “Bellingham Estate: Naming of Streets,” 22 July, 1920, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/001; LCC Bellingham Site map, c. 1920, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/002; G. Topham Forrest, “Superintending Architect’s Report: Bellingham Estate: Naming of Roads,” 23 February, 1921, LCC/AR/CB/02/003; Google Maps, accessed 7 May 2024, <https://maps.app.goo.gl/8Lo6SEeBxo3XAeUH9>. This long lineage, in this case from King Athelstan, was also given in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s *Charter for Social Housing Residents* (London: HMSO, 2020), 8.

⁶⁴ Chief Sanitary Inspector, Ministry of Health Public Inquiry, (30 July 1919), 28, TNA/HLG 47/18.

⁶⁵ G. Topham Forrest J. P. Orr, 23 June 1921, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/004.

⁶⁶ E. H. Parkes to G. J. Palmer, memorandum re. “Bellingham Estate: names of new streets,” 9 July 1920. LCC/AR/CB/02/001; Parkes to Assistant Architect (Constructional), memorandum re. “Bellingham Estate: names for streets, etc.” 22 February 1921 and Topham Forrest, “Bellingham Estate: Naming of Roads,” 23 February, 1921, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/003.

⁶⁷ “The Housing of the Working Classes Acts 1890-1919, Bethnal Green: Report of an Inquiry held by Mr H. A. Chapman F.R.I.B.A. on the 30th July 1919: “The Opposition”,” 17 TNA/HLG 47/18.

per room than the LCC's five-storey blocks scheme, Vaughan stated that "Health and posterity were more to be considered than money".⁶⁸

Marjory Allen literalized the connection between England, empire, and posterity when she served on the Coronation Planting Committee for King George VI. In their commemorative booklet, entitled *For King and Countryside*, the Committee described an "empire-wide" tree-planting scheme and the booklet itself was lavishly illustrated with photographs of elm avenues, stands of beeches, school children gardening in their school garden, and a cricket team playing on a village green, captioned, "Trees and grass are the background of our English scene."⁶⁹ Slum clearance was specifically mentioned because "Many slum clearance schemes will be planned during Coronation year," so this was a "golden opportunity for Coronation planting" to offer these new schemes "facilities for outdoor communal life." This English culture of flowers, games and gamesmanship, King, cottages, the Church of England ("The church tower stands guard over the village bowling-green") was to be implanted in housing schemes in England itself, but also in planting schemes across the empire. (Bowling greens and tennis lawns were a perennial concern; the LCC's Director of Housing, J. P. Orr, wrote to the Architect's office in 1921 to say that he had "noticed that the greens in front of the blocks of houses as being set out," at Bellingham, "would be too small to be used for games such as tennis, bowls or badminton. In the case of Roehampton Estate, you undertook to make the greens of such a size that they could be used by residents for either of those games.")⁷⁰ Returning to the coronation, every official body who engaged in a planting scheme could apply for a Commemorative Plaque and the names of those who took part in the scheme would be entered into the Royal Record and presented to Their Majesties. *For King and Countryside* highlights how slum clearance, council housing, 'Englishness' and empire all interlocked in a vision of England as a racial organic community that stretched across Britain and across the world, from the past (ancient trees) to the present (planning schemes in progress) to the future (of the children in their school gardens).

This view of an organic racial community that was distinctively English and distinctively modern was echoed in Whitehall. As well as serving on the LCC and visiting the Continent Lewis Silkin was a member of the Central Housing Advisory Committee's Sub-Committee on Planning who convened in October 1936 to estimate council housing needs around the country over the next five to ten years and consider whether regional planning authorities could be formed.⁷¹ The Planning sub-committee read a report on population distribution in Dorset by the anthropologist, eugenicist and fascist George Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, though the minutes do not record whether they discussed it, whereas they certainly did discuss the report contributed by their secretary, a civil servant of the Ministry of Health, Mr. A. Zaiman.⁷² Zaiman began his "First Note on Planning" by reminding readers of the classical antecedents of urban planning in

⁶⁸ "The Housing of the Working Classes Acts 1890-1919, Bethnal Green: Report of an Inquiry held by Mr H. A. Chapman F.R.I.B.A. on the 30th July 1919: "The Mayor – cross examined," 20. At the same inquiry (p. 28), the Chief Sanitary Inspector of Bethnal Green, John Foot, "pleaded", in the words of the minute-taker, for a "healthy housing standard, whatever it cost", arguing again that the Jewish Burial Ground "would make an ideal open space" for both current and future residents of the area. TNA/HLG 47/18.

⁶⁹ Coronation Planting Committee, *For King and Countryside: Towards a More Beautiful Britain* (London: Coronation Planting Committee, [1936]), 19, 10, MRC/MSS.121/HO/6/24/1.

⁷⁰ J. P. Orr to G. Topham Forrest, February 26, 1921. LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/003. Orr happened to be a former Indian Civil Service employee with experience of housing projects in Bombay, For Orr's background, see Simon Pepper and Peter Richmond, "Cottages, Flats, and Reconditioning Renewal Strategies in London after World War One," *Construction History* 23 (2008): 110.

⁷¹ CHAC Sub-Committee on Planning, minutes of first meeting, 16 October 1938, TNA/HLG 37/41.

⁷² Sub-Committee on Planning, minutes of meeting 19 May 1937, TNA/HLG 37/41.

Sumer, the Indus Valley, Egypt and the “well-known” endeavours of the Greeks and Romans, before arguing that “There is no real historical parallel to present proposals to plan the whole of national life (neither Hellenistic Egypt under the Ptolemies [nor] the Inca state are really comparable), but the movement is so widespread, from its ambitious manifestations in the USSR and experiments such as the Tennessee Valley development, USA, that it appears to be in accord with the needs of the age.”⁷³ Zaiman went on to argue for the unique importance of planning, in general, and housing, in particular to England because it was “the birth-place not only of the great industrial changes of the last century but also of the individualist laissez-faire theory which is their ideological counterpart.” He continued that the location of industry was the heart of the matter because “all the other requirements of social life – the provision of houses, open spaces, roads and all the amenities essential to a civilised community” depend on industry. To illustrate his point Zaiman drew two related contrasts, the first between planning decisions made in the USSR “which was, from the industrial point of view, virgin territory,” and “a highly developed country such as England,” which had to take man-made features like railways into account as well, and the second, the controversy then in the news “over the greater suitability of Scunthorpe (close to the raw material) or Jarrow (where labour, houses etc., already exist) as the site for a new steel works.”⁷⁴ In this vision, housing was an indispensable element of the English people’s ability to continue making their country the workshop of the world, and to keep their place, Zaiman implied, among the world’s great empires.

The modernist imperial pastoral invoked by *Housing*, CHAC, and the Institute of Landscape Architects was far from unique to those bodies. Matless traces the spread of understandings of Englishness and landscape developed by a small group of writers and ramblers whom he labels ‘planner-preservationists’ to capture their self-conscious and determined modernism and their belief that they could find an Englishness in the pastoral and the rural that was not conservative, nostalgic, or reactionary, but rather bright, fresh and forward-looking.⁷⁵ Matless concentrates on the influence of these people on cultural understandings of how to *be* in the English landscape, what were appropriate modes in which to experience it, and, how it should be preserved or managed. Yet the great cottage estates of the interwar era that were built outside England’s cities, like Becontree (London), Wythenshawe (Manchester), Kingstanding (Birmingham) and Speke (Liverpool) were designed, built, and managed by a group of people who, broadly, shared the social background of Matless’s planner-preservationists (middle to upper middle-class professional men educated at elite grammar or public schools), and believed sincerely that their estates could produce just that kind of Englishness: modern, technocratic, and civilised, which is to say *imperial*. Matless’ identification of the ‘planner-preservationist’ ethos is significant and applying it to the politics and culture of council housing allows us to see the strength of its influence on the ordinary life of everyone who came under the purview of council housing and slum clearance. Council housing, because it was the private space of the family, allows us to see how this modernist ethos of a classed, raced, gendered Englishness was built into council housing and the lives of its residents.

Tracing this ethos in the law and policy of council housing is key to understanding not only its interwar, but also its postwar trajectory. Matless’s ‘planner-preservationists’ were already relatively closely linked, in terms of social class and background; the social, cultural, and

⁷³ A. Zaiman, “First Note on Planning,” Paper P.2, n.d. [1937], 1, TNA/HLG 37/41. See also 297 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1935) cols. 359-63.

⁷⁴ Zaiman, Paper P.2, 1, TNA/HLG 37/41.

⁷⁵ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, Part I.

political links between those who shared that ethos and made council housing law and policy in London were closer still.⁷⁶ Mostly drawn from the professional middle classes and gravitating towards the centre-left of the Labour Party, sometimes via the Liberals, this group of people began to exert a distinct influence over council housing and slum clearance in the interwar period and they became the leaders of council housing policy-making and implementation during the postwar reconstruction. The group includes familiar figures, like Lewis Silkin, figures known to specialist historians, like Marjory Allen, and others, who are not widely known, like Frank W. Hunt, Chief Valuer of the LCC from 1920 until the mid-1950s, and John Wrigley, first seen as a secretary at the Ministry of Health working with the LCC on post-1919 housing schemes, last seen Sir John Wrigley, KBE, CB, Trustee of the Sutton Dwellings Trust overseeing two joint development projects with Plymouth Corporation in 1958 and 1959.⁷⁷ It was their goals for council housing, their understanding of what problems it was to solve, that formed the core of council housing law and policy in mid-twentieth century Britain. In Westminster, the period of this group's influence was bookended, roughly, by Labour's first major Housing Act, that of 1930 and the last attempt to make council housing competitive with the private sector, mandating higher standards for space, heating and fitout, in 1967.⁷⁸ In Whitehall, it was institutionalised in the Central Housing Advisory Committee, founded in 1936, abolished 1975.⁷⁹

Council housing is, therefore, an example of the much-discussed 'consensus' among Britain's technocratic elite over certain forms of state intervention in social life, otherwise known as the welfare state, in the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁰ Despite differing ideologies and allegiances, senior politicians and civil servants operated across party lines under broad agreement over the form and *raison d'être* of council housing for roughly forty years. Here I offer a variant interpretation on the role of consensus in mid-twentieth-century British life. I argue that council housing is an example of what that consensus actually entailed – its development a major part of what we might call 'actually existing social democracy' in Britain. To borrow a term from

⁷⁶ Matless, *Landscape*, ch. 2.

⁷⁷ Plymouth, Miles Mitchell Housing Estate, Crownhill, Plans and Reports, 1958-59, Plymouth Archives and Local Studies (hereafter PLY) 1743/1.

⁷⁸ This mandate was published in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's Circular 36/67 in 1967 and went into effect for new towns at once, and council housing on 1 January 1969. 750 Parl. Deb. H. C. (5th ser.) (1967) col. 351W-52W; "Standards up for council houses," *The Times* Wednesday, 26 April, 1967, p. 3. See Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatization of Council Housing* (London: Routledge, 1988), 27-28; John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985* 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1986), 307-10; Jamileh Manoochehri, "Social Policy and Housing: Reflections of Social Values," PhD thesis, University College London, 2009, 223.

⁷⁹ National Archives, Records of Committees, accessed April 23, 2024

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8731>.

⁸⁰ Paul Addison who wrote the first major investigation of the postwar consensus called it the 'Whitehall consensus' in the revised edition of *The Road to 1945* (London: Cape, 1975); that is a term I agree with. As I do here, Brian Harrison argued in a 1999 article that 'consensus' should be extended back into the interwar period, if not further. Brian Harrison, "The Rise, Fall and Rise of Political Consensus in Britain," *History* 84, no. 274 (1999): 301-24; Richard Toye, "From 'Consensus' to 'Common Ground': The Rhetoric of the Postwar Settlement and its Collapse," *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 1 (2013): 2-23. David Edgerton has recently argued that 'social democracy' and 'consensus' are poorly defined and unhelpful terms; however, with council housing, they are, because of the ways that the consensus was indeed a *Whitehall* consensus, engaged in a back-and-forth with the housing departments of the big cities *and* because, as Edgerton acknowledges, 'social democracy' *is* useful if it is a "narrower, well-specified technical" term. David Edgerton, "What Came Between New Liberalism and Neoliberalism? Rethinking Keynesianism, the Welfare State and Social Democracy," in *The Neoliberal Age? Britain Since the 1970s* ed. Aled Davies, Ben Jackson, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (London: University College London Press, 2021), 31.

CHAC, the purposes, procedures, and priorities of council housing were to intervene in the social and cultural lives of subjects, to reform them by reshaping the homes in which they lived, in order to make those people into better citizens. Thus, the consensus was in part over the *how* – council housing – but more importantly over the *why* of making better citizens, which was, in turn, consensus over the question of what a British citizen was: a member of a white, heterosexual nuclear family. Before 1945, that citizen was imagined as an imperial citizen; after 1945 the ideal citizen-resident of council housing was something somewhat different, the English social democrat, who is the subject of the following chapter. Only a minority of people involved in high-level housing law and policy-making in this period ever called themselves social democrats, and a good number were Conservatives. Nevertheless, the grounds for consensus were formed in the 1920s, as council housing expanded after 1919, by a coalition of Liberals, some Conservatives, and Labourites and began to approach its postwar shape in the 1930s under Labour and the National Governments. The ideals of that consensus – housing for citizenship – were put into practice in full in the late 1940s and 1950s, came under strain in the 1960s, and broke entirely in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸¹ In an illustrative irony, the respective ministers who oversaw the legal changes at the beginning and end of this period (1930 and 1967) were Greenwood and Greenwood, father and son.

Part II: Need and Knowledge Production

When the Housing Act, 1919 ordered local authorities to assess the extent of ‘housing need’ in their districts and to build council estates to ameliorate it as a condition of receiving funding, it brought into the domain of government a question from which the law of housing would never again be free: what *is* housing need?⁸² As we saw in the previous chapter, what constituted a slum was in the eye of the beholder and arguments over what ‘unfit for human habitation’ meant moved smoothly from the structural integrity of a dwelling to the characteristics and behaviour of a dwelling’s inhabitants. Reflecting this history, the 1919 Act was not dogmatic. It framed ‘unfit for human habitation’ as criteria that those charged with looking for housing need, especially Medical Officers of Health, employees of the local authority, knew and recognised. Minister of Health, Christopher Addison, argued that it was the very lack of definitions, either of unfitness or of ‘working classes’ that made the Act workable, as it enabled the local authorities to build the “type of house” most appropriate to their district and the needs of their people.⁸³ He argued, “we must expect the public authorities and public utility societies to secure that they are let to the persons for whom they are intended,” through knowledge of local needs, tradition, custom, and industry, as well as the general understanding Britain’s professional classes shared over what did or did not constitute ‘unfit for human habitation.’⁸⁴

Nevertheless, local authorities were not left on their own to determine housing need. The Ministry of Health made considerable attempts to disseminate best practices. They sent local authorities and their residential housing commissioners statutory rules and orders, circulars and

⁸¹ See chs. 3 and 4. David Vincent (*Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, Longman, 1991)) remarked the end of this consensus too when he described a leading postwar scholar of social policy as “the last in a line of academic critics who had the opportunity to play a direct role in the administration of the system of relief” (203).

⁸² Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1919, 9 & 10 Geo. 5, c. 35. The Act became law on 31 July 1919 and local authorities were bound to start work within 3 months (s. 1(1)).

⁸³ 116 Parl. Deb. H. C. (5th ser.) (1919) col. 1175.

⁸⁴ 116 Parl. Deb. H. C. (5th ser.) (1919) col. 1180-83.

memoranda, manuals, and models for different forms of contracts; *The Home I Want, Housing*, the major government report that was the template for the 1919 Act, the Tudor Walters Report, and the *Manual* all included sample plans.⁸⁵ The Ministry also instituted a multi-step approval process where local authorities had to have sites approved first, then lay-outs (general plan for the site including what types of house, where they would be, and how many), then plans, and quotes for contractors, both for the construction work itself, and for the supply of all materials for the scheme, from plants to door hinges. At the LCC's suburban south London estate, Bellingham, the LCC sought approval from the Ministry of Health on such diverse matters as iron window casements, insulation made of asbestos sheeting, whether the brickwork below damp-courses could be tarred, and "unclimbable" iron railings between Bellingham and the railway and around the central green.⁸⁶

The cumulative picture given by *Housing* is of a ministry dedicated to tabulating and quantifying progress. Applications and approvals were a metonym for the regeneration of England and Wales, as the tables on local authorities' housing progress included in nearly every issue showed. The first group of tables tracked the submissions and approvals of individual sites at every stage: site selection, split into urban and rural, followed by lay-outs, which were drawings with the scaled layout of the entire estate, and finally by plans, which were the plans for each dwelling-type to be constructed on the site. Tabulating all of this data allowed the reader to see how different schemes were progressing, and they could also keep track of how many acres, in the case of sites, and houses, in the case of lay-outs and plans, were under the aegis of this process. The second table broke down the information contained in the first table not by local authority, but by region: each row of the lower table, labelled A, B, C etc., is a region of England, with Wales listed as region D. *Housing* promoted a vision of England and Wales as one single entity made up of constituent parts moving toward the common goal of "healthy and pleasant houses for our people."⁸⁷

The atmosphere of cheerful progress *Housing* worked so hard to project did not survive the economic and political dislocations of the 1920s, and *Housing* itself was cancelled in 1921. But the slums, and the morbidity, mortality, deviancy, and crime observers associated with them, had not disappeared and so when Labour contested the general election in 1929 it put Housing and Slum Clearance at the head of its first order of business in its manifesto, *National*

⁸⁵ For circulars, see e.g. "Housing Schemes," circular from the Local Government Board, June 1919, LMA/LCC/CL/HSG/01/017; circular 69, "Housing Acts (Compulsory Purchase) Amendment Regulations, 1920," Ministry of Health, 14 February 1920, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/03/018; Memorandum to Housing Commissioners no. 23, "Monthly Reports on the Progress of Housing Schemes", Ministry of Health, 11 July 1919 TNA/HLG 31/1. For sample plans elsewhere see the Local Government Board, *Manual on State-Aided Housing Schemes*, 53-end, TNA/HLG 31/3; and e.g. *Housing* 1 no. 1 (1919): 7-8; Local Government Boards of England and Wales and Scotland, *Report of the Committee appointed to consider questions of Building Construction in connection with the provision of dwellings for the Working Classes in England and Wales, and Scotland*, 1919, Cd. 9191, 24; Reiss, *Home I Want*, illustration 11.

⁸⁶ Iron casements: Notes of Site Visit, Bellingham Estate by Mr Parkes, 30 September 1920, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/002; asbestos: London County Council Housing Committee Meeting, 22 June 1921, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/004; brickwork: G. Topham Forrest to Raymond Unwin, 22 February 1922, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/006; iron railing for railway: London County Council Housing Committee Meeting, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/005; iron railway for garden: G. Topham Forrest to the Secretary, Ministry of Health, 30 October 1922, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/009.

⁸⁷ Addison, "Housing and Peace," 1.

Development and Prosperity.⁸⁸ The party's policy statement on housing was simple: building houses to be let, not sold, at "Working-class Rents" and dealing "drastically with the Slum disgrace" with the "necessary money and grants for both purposes."⁸⁹ Labour went on to form a minority government under Ramsay MacDonald, and though the government held power for just over two years, its Housing Act, which became law on the first of August 1930, had far-reaching consequences.⁹⁰

Looking back on the Housing Act of 1930 from eight years later, after two slum clearance 'drives,' and other changes to housing legislation, including its own establishment in 1936, the Central Housing Advisory Committee explained that that act had introduced an "entirely fresh principle" to housing law and policy. It was that "the slum house was to be demolished and the tenants removed to a new house; the very poorest were to be rehoused."⁹¹ The National Governments that followed Labour's minority government did not deviate from this new principle; if anything they expanded it, describing new funding measures for slum clearance as a "national effort" to ensure a "speedier end to the evil."⁹² Instead of the uncertain trickle-down effects of expanding supply through cottage estates for the most stable and successful members of the working class, local authorities were required to survey their districts, prepare plans for the abolition of slums, clear them, and rehouse their occupants. They were given direct subsidies in order to do so, up to and including rent rebates for the former slum dwellers who became council tenants.⁹³ Moreover, for the first time, local authorities were empowered to use overcrowding as a means of declaring an area an "improvement" area and to demolish unfit houses there, even if the area was not able to be declared a "clearance" area, that is, one in which every house could be demolished.⁹⁴

The many plans, the minute attention paid to every detail, and the strict approval process of every stage of slum clearance and estate development demonstrate the importance of knowing, understanding, and managing working-class life. They also speak to how difficult that knowledge was to collect. Detailed records of the extent of the 'slum problem' began to be kept by the Ministry of Health, for England and Wales, in their *Particulars of Slum Clearance* series, as well as the Ministry's annual reports, and the Department of Health, for Scotland, after the passage of their respective Housing Acts in 1930.⁹⁵ But it turned out that the slum problem remained, in the words of Minister of Health in 1935, Edward Hilton Young, "extremely elusive." The compilers of the Report on Housing for the 1931 standard noted, with a touch of frustration, that "The generalized use in Census reports of the 'more than 2 persons per room' density as a comparative index of the prevalence and distribution of overcrowding has sometimes been challenged in the mistaken belief that it was intended to serve as an absolute standard of overcrowding," so "In the absence of any nationally accepted standard it was

⁸⁸ Labour Party General Election Manifesto 1929, *Labour's Appeal to the Nation*, in *Labour Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997* Vol. II ed. Dennis Kavanagh and Ian Dale (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 33. Housing Act, 1921, 9 & 10 Geo. 5, c. 19; Housing Act, 1923, 13 & 14 Geo. 5, c. 24; Housing Act, 1925, 15 & 16 Geo. 5, c. 14.

⁸⁹ Labour Party General Election Manifesto 1929, in *General Election Manifestos*, 35.

⁹⁰ Housing Act, 1930, 20 & 21 Geo. 5, c. 39.

⁹¹ CHAC, *The Management of Municipal Housing Estates* (London: HMSO, 1938), 7.

⁹² Cmd. 4535, 1934, 3.

⁹³ Housing Act, 1930, 20 & 21 Geo. 5, c. 39, s. 1(1), s.27(1)(c). See also summary in B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: A Second Social Survey of York* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1941), 224.

⁹⁴ Housing Act, 1930, 20 & 21 Geo. 5, c. 39, s.7(1); ss.1-2.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Health, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1930-1931*, 1931, Cmd. 3937, 2. On counting and the managed economy see Tomlinson, *Managing the Economy*, 8.

necessary...to fix upon a formula by which to determine the minimum number of rooms *a family of a given constitution* should be deemed to require in order to assess the adequacy or otherwise of its actual holding” (emphasis mine).⁹⁶ Even the census report acknowledged that the house was the container of the family and overcrowding was thus dependent on one or another “commonly accepted” principles, thus, they also criticised the principle of sex separation other than persons living as husband and wife because “correspondence is disturbed by lack of uniformity in the age at which sex separation is deemed to be desirable.”⁹⁷ The more the slums were examined, the more it became clear that, “We do not know how big the problem...is and we shall not know until we have carried out the survey.”⁹⁸ Slums at least were visible to the naked eye (of the correct beholder), whereas overcrowding was invisible, intangible, and slippery:

overcrowding may occur in one place and then in another. Therefore the first essential for an effective remedy for overcrowding is that it should be universal over the whole country at one time so that you will not drive overcrowding from one place and allow it to occur in another. The second essential condition for a remedy is that we must not be content with mere pious aspirations and indirect action but be ready to back our plan with the whole force of law, to enforce it by law, so that we shall be certain that the money which is spent will secure the result which we desire to achieve.⁹⁹

The Housing Acts, 1935 and 1936 were the first to punish landlords for overcrowding their premises, and householders too, if they were found to have rejected suitable alternative accommodation and the Housing Act, 1935 set out the legal standard of overcrowding, still in force today.¹⁰⁰ The permissive *local authorities know the housing needs of their own people best*, which understood Britain as a patchwork of jurisdictions, had not disappeared from housing law and policy, but the imperatives of public health – which Young made very clear were to eliminate tuberculosis, the “white scourge” – drove a national campaign that mandated examining and finding and following certain families from home to home.

Overall, the opinion of the policy-makers was coalescing around the idea that intensive local, personal knowledge that could then be put to use in service of the family, the nation, and the empire was crucial. This required learning the “existing social-economic structure” but such knowledge was “sadly lacking,” Zaiman opined to CHAC in his report. State planning of anything had to rest on a foundation of knowledge of *all* the ‘interlocking’ factors that had made England what it was.¹⁰¹ The list of the many factors, agencies, organisations and bodies that affected ‘planning’ which Zaiman included speak to the ambitions for comprehension that elite centre-left opinion was embracing. Comprehension required power and knowledge. Zaiman pointed out that given the division of labour between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health when it came to planning for industry *versus* planning for homes, the proposed planning agency would have to be interdepartmental, for a start, and second, its wide remit demanded “a

⁹⁶ *Census of England and Wales 1931: Housing: Reports and Tables*, chapter 7, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

⁹⁷ *Census of England and Wales 1931: Housing: Reports and Tables*, chapter 7, xxvii.

⁹⁸ 297 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1935) cols. 362-3.

⁹⁹ 297 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1935) col. 363.

¹⁰⁰ Housing Act, 1936 s. 58(1)(a). This standard, and a stricter version of the ‘room standard’, discussed below, standards are still legally binding. See Wendy Wilson and Cathy Barton, “Overcrowded housing (England),” House of Commons Briefing Paper no. 1013, 1 October 2018, 4-5.

¹⁰¹ Zaiman, Paper P.2, 1, TNA/HLG 37/41.

staff of experts” with “free access to all departmental or local government sources of information and, if possible, those of private firms.”¹⁰² Calling this agency “experimental”, Zaiman proposed starting small, perhaps by focusing only on one aspect of planning, for instance housing, or starting in one of the Distressed Areas, before “extending the scope of the body to a national scale.” Thinking about housing, industry, the “differential fertility among social classes,” England, national defence, the relation of central to local authorities, were all factors Zaiman suggested ought to be studied and taken into consideration for planning decisions, as he outlined a planning scheme for England – Britain – which was comprehensive, and scaleable: from the family to the nation to the empire.

Part III: Social Citizenship

Despite the technocratic slant of the framers of council housing law and policy, its role as a teacher of citizenship and culture – racing its inhabitants – meant it became an important site of popular politics. The authorities recognised it as such: the memorandum at the beginning of the *Manual on State-Aided Housing* noted the severity of the shortage of working-class housing then existing and argued, as George had in 1918, that “the present problem differs from the pre-war problem not only in degree but in kind”.¹⁰³ Many existing houses did not meet “desirable minimum” standards, and many more “barely attain[ed]” them. These were also matters, suggested the Board, that the working classes were themselves invested: “The standard of accommodation and equipment desired in their houses by all sections of the working people has been rising”. That the Board should even admit that working people could drive housing standards was a departure from earlier understandings of the housing problem, that the Board approved of what they called “this tendency towards an improved standard” was also striking.¹⁰⁴ The war had made it possible to see slum dwellers as members of the ‘Imperial race’ for the first time and as the private market had failed to integrate slum dwellers into the nation that duty should be taken up by the state.¹⁰⁵ Greenwood invoked the *we* of the political class when he intoned, “We are all familiar how in every town...there are...houses huddled together as though for very shame, houses teeming with people who are citizens or potential citizens of this country.”¹⁰⁶ What had changed was that now, as citizens, politicians and policy-makers acknowledged, instead of difference, that “The people who inhabit the slums are much like the people who occupy the benches in this House.”¹⁰⁷

Stephen King-Hall, a naval commander, writer, and Liberal/Labour politician, in a speech not about council housing but to raise money for the Lambeth Housing Movement, a philanthropic housing association, offered an articulation of what he called the “moral” and “economic” sides of the housing problem.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, however, he showed how the Victorian

¹⁰² Zaiman, Paper P.2, 3, TNA/HLG 37/41.

¹⁰³ Local Government Board, Memorandum, items 1, 2, *Manual on State-Aided Housing Schemes*, 3, TNA/HLG 31/3.

¹⁰⁴ Local Government Board, Memorandum item 2, *Manual on State-Aided Housing Schemes*, 3, TNA/HLG 31/3.

¹⁰⁵ “Mr Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times*, November 25, 1918.

¹⁰⁶ 237 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1930) Vol. 237 col. 1801.

¹⁰⁷ 237 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1930) cols. 1801-02.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen King-Hall, speech on behalf of the Lambeth Housing Movement, November 1933. Minutes of ‘Drawing Room’ meetings, correspondence and transcriptions of talks relating to the meetings and a list of Lambeth Housing Movement stock holders, Lambeth Archives (hereafter LAM)/IV/111/1/12. See E. R. Thompson, “Hall, (William) Stephen Richard King-, Baron King-Hall,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, <https://doi-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/34326>).

understanding of the slum problem as a problem of moral, physical, and political health – that of the empire – was confounded by the mass suffrage and increasing electoral power of the urban working classes at home, and by the ‘politics in a sharper key,’ Communism and Fascism, abroad. King-Hall began his speech in November 1933 with a longstanding trope: describing his own visit to the slums. Like the Victorian and Edwardian philanthropists before him, he claimed authenticity and knowledge by reenacting a conversation he had with an inhabitant of the slums, so as to make the stakes of his argument clear and personal for the audience of potential donors. However, unlike Victorian sensation journalism or the moral reclamation work of Octavia Hill, where samples of conversation served to underscore the distance of slum dwellers from the rest of society, King-Hall used it to underscore their closeness. He said that he had had “a long conversation with a charming woman who lived in a slum, called Mrs Porter.” Mrs Porter, at the end of their conversation said, “Goodbye, it is very kind of you to come and take an interest;” King-Hall replied that upon thinking “how I should feel if I had to live in a house like yours and I knew that only a few miles from me were people living in every comfort,” he saw it as “very kind of you [Mrs Porter] not to want to hang me from the nearest lamppost.”¹⁰⁹ King-Hall went on to make the ‘business’ case, as he called it, for investing in council housing, slum clearance, and philanthropic housing, and again, this was an older argument retooled for a Britain of mass suffrage and mass unemployment. “We are all shareholders in the vast concern of Great Britain Limited,” he announced, “and none of us in the long run can disassociate ourselves from the state of well-being of the community of which each of us is a member,” King-Hall did *not*, as his predecessors had, emphasise the loss to ‘Great Britain Limited’ caused by morbidity and delinquency bred in the slums. Instead, reflecting on the greater provision of social services, King-Hall argued that slum conditions were a direct and immediate loss to the taxpayer “to the tune of £90 millions” on education alone, not to mention maternity benefits. “What is the good of educating a child to live a full life and then condemning it to live and grow up and perpetuate its kind in the conditions to be found in our slums?”¹¹⁰ King-Hall also drew attention to the perilous situation the world found itself, from the “strange economic experiments...taking place in national laboratories,” to the “great defaults” that “have shaken the sanctity of contract,” to argue for his housing association on the grounds, “If we are not to fall out of a frying pan into a fire...it is essential that we should continue to progress in an evolutionary and ordinary manner, and that capitalism should show that it can work and adjust itself to the needs of the times.”¹¹¹ Again, these were not new arguments, but they were being made with an awareness that the domestic *and* international context had changed very rapidly in the very recent past and, King-Hall said “the ship of State must be re-designed, [but] that does not prevent me giving my whole-hearted support to some salvage work [of philanthropic housing] whilst we are deciding whether or not we must build a new ship.” Like Silkin, but in a *more* inclusive way, given his use of ‘British,’ King-Hall quipped, “It may be, indeed that in our peculiar British way we shall gradually evolve from Noah’s Ark into something more up-to-date.”¹¹² King-Hall’s speech made it clear that the questions of fitness, soundness, fairness, equality, and the whole enterprise that was ‘Great Britain Ltd’, or the Ship of State, were made real and urgent by the slums.

¹⁰⁹ King-Hall speech, November 1933, 1, LAM/IV/111/1/12.

¹¹⁰ King-Hall speech, November 1933, 3, LAM/IV/111/1/12. See also John G. Martin, *Facts and Figures Regarding the Present Housing Situation in England and Wales* (London: National Housing and Town Planning Council, 1935), 7, Wellcome Library (hereafter WELL) +P241.

¹¹¹ King-Hall speech, November 1933, 4-5, LAM/IV/111/1/12.

¹¹² King-Hall speech, November 1933, 2-3, LAM/IV/111/1/12.

Council housing also raised questions of equality that were hard to settle. In a slum clearance scheme in Brady Street, Bethnal Green, the LCC proposed a land swap with one of the borough's biggest landowners, brewery company Mann, Crossman and Paulin, Ltd. As well as swapping land in Brady Street to make the area to be cleared both more geographically compact and more capacious, M.P.&C further proposed to rehouse 150 residents of the cleared area in a new suburban development in Walthamstow. M.P.&C's representative argued that because of easy access provided by direct trains that took only twenty minutes, "locally... Walthamstow was looked upon as the natural outlet from Bethnal Green".¹¹³ However, the mayor of Bethnal Green, J. J. Vaughan, objected sharply to this scheme. Walthamstow was not within the radius of workmen's fares, he said, and, "Speaking as a working man," the minutes of the inquiry recorded, "he [Vaughan] had no knowledge of where that particular site [in Walthamstow] was to be in Higham's Park, but he did know what it meant to get to Higham's Park".¹¹⁴ Vaughan went on to object to other parts of the LCC's scheme and the minutes summed up his explanation of his position: "His object was to get as much improvement as he could in Bethnal Green for the housing of the working people... As to extra expense which would fall on other people than the ratepayers of Bethnal Green by the inclusion of additional properties in the scheme... The whole of the ratepayers of London might have to pay for the scheme, but the whole of the ratepayers suffered if an epidemic broke out in an insanitary area."¹¹⁵ Vaughan's pugnacious testimony, his personal identification with his constituents, and his doomed fight for a cottage estate along Bellingham lines in central London suggests a different understanding of levelling up than that held by the civil servants managing Bellingham. Although the slum dwellers of Brady Street were not ratepayers, they were still Londoners, and they could not be moved around at will by the LCC and corporations. The slum dwellers of Brady Street might have unfortunate proclivities, and a cottage estate in the suburbs was out of their reach because their lack of skills demanded that they stay close to sources of casual labour, including labour that could be done at home, but that did *not* mean, according to their representatives on the borough council, that they were not entitled to the English citizenship that modern cottage estates would convey.¹¹⁶

Thus, the council house became an explicitly political space. Mr Albert Walker, of Bellingham, wrote to the Housing Estates Manager in 1922 to complain about a high fence that had been put up at the back of his house, "which will obscure the view and in other ways cause inconvenience, which act I deem to be a breach of faith in so far as this tenancy is concerned."¹¹⁷ He further wrote, that he had "heard, but do not rely on local chatter for confirmation, that the land at the rear of gardens is required for a sports ground... if such be the case, it will be simply just and proper that whatever sums be received in rent for this ground be used proportionately in relief for the high rents at present paid by the tenants". He concluded, "I cannot believe that the authorities have any designs upon the 'freedom of the subject' in so far as it concerns the tenants upon this Estate". The grammar and style of Walker's letter suggest that he was both well-educated and confident, so perhaps more likely to feel comfortable complaining to the Council, but he was not the only tenant to voice his complaints. In October 1923 Mrs N. Day wrote to the Minister of Health to complain about the state of the sewers in Bellingham:

¹¹³ Sir H. Courthope Munro, Ministry of Health Public Inquiry, (1 June 1920), 20, TNA/HLG 47/19.

¹¹⁴ J. J. Vaughan, Ministry of Health Public Inquiry, (1 June 1920), 27, TNA/HLG 47/19.

¹¹⁵ J. J. Vaughan, Ministry of Health Public Inquiry, (1 June 1920), 30, TNA/HLG 47/19.

¹¹⁶ Chief Sanitary Inspector, Ministry of Health Public Inquiry, (30 July 1919), 27; Medical Officer of Health Ministry of Health Public Inquiry, (30 July 1919), 21, TNA/HLG 47/18.

¹¹⁷ Albert L. Walker to LCC Housing Estates Manager, 5 September 1922, LMA/LCC/HSG/GEN/01/030.

Will you please have the drains attended to on this Estate, the sewerage is in an atrocious condition, repeated applications have been made to the L.C.C. and the L.B.C. [Lewisham Borough Council] also your department and have failed to get any satisfaction. The stinks that arise from the open manholes have gradually got to a state when it is imperative that the matter should be seen to at once as already there has been one death through diphtheria and many septic throats through this scourge this makes the third throat I have had since we have lived here...My husband and little boy as well as myself are still under medical treatment and certainly I do think it's a monstrous thing to pay heavy rents to be slowly poisoned. I trust you will take this matter up at once if you can do nothing please say so and I will have it attended to in Parliament.¹¹⁸

Between them Walker and Day articulated their understanding of the agreement into which they had entered when they became tenants at Bellingham. In exchange for high rents, they expected pleasant, healthy surroundings. When they did not get them, the fact that their landlord was the state made them certain that the state's failure to uphold its side of the bargain was an attack on their rights as subjects. As Day pointed out, an appropriate response to their negligent landlord would be to have the matter 'attended to in Parliament'.¹¹⁹ The state's vision for a new Britain had given it unprecedented powers to shape its subjects' home lives through the new kinds of spaces that were the housing estates. This vision *also* produced a new relationship between citizen and state: if the home and family were constituted by the state, it became a political space, and its inhabitants, as well as the state, could and did treat it as such.

Conclusion

After Britain had achieved universal suffrage for men, and then also for women, and its empire had reached its greatest, but also perhaps most precarious state ever, council housing as a school for citizenship became imperative. Housing estates were carefully designed to evoke a particular kind of white, working-class Englishness in their tenants, and were an expression in bricks and mortar of how Britain's professional elite was coming to understand race, class, and gender politics in the twilight of empire. Tenants of the housing estates were monitored by their landlord, the state, but as they were indeed citizens, there to learn all the qualities of the liberal subject, tenants could and did make demands of the state and to assert their rights and autonomy as political subjects in every space they entered. All of this made the council house and the family within it flexible, and over time law-makers argued that council housing could only work if houses and families were known and studied closely, paving the way for a large knowledge-production apparatus.

The very instability of the space of the council home – who it was for, what one could do in it, what its overall purposes were – allowed council housing to be many things to many different people. The politicians and policy-makers sincerely believed that the English pastoral, or its Scottish equivalent, *was* inclusive; but the politics of class, gender, and race that were bound up with council housing meant it could just as easily become exclusive. How this happened in the postwar era is the subject of the next chapter.

¹¹⁸ Mrs N. Day to the Minister of Health, 29 October 1923, LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/015.

¹¹⁹ In a further complaint about the same issue three years later Mr Day included the name of his representative. Mr H. W. Day to the Ministry of Health, 5 December 1926. LMA/LCC/AR/CB/02/015.

Chapter Three

Between English Social Democrats and Housing Need: Council Housing and the Social-Democratic Moment, 1945-1964

As the Second World War came to an end housing was *the most* pressing issue in Britain. The government estimated in 1945 that 475,000 houses had been destroyed or made permanently uninhabitable by enemy action and that not more than 200,000 houses had been built during the six war years, compared with more than 300,000 per year in the late 1930s.¹ In some places, like Poplar in the East End of London, there was scarcely one habitable house left in the borough.² By the time the war was ending a series of polls by Gallup found that Britons regarded housing as a more serious issue than employment.³ Faced with this crisis the new Labour government that had been swept to power in July 1945 was determined to rise to the challenge. Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, declared that Labour's housing policy would revive "what was always the lovely feature of English and Welsh villages, where the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and farm labourer all lived in the same street."⁴

In 1949 the Ministry of Health released a glossy brochure, *Housing Progress*, celebrating the government's achievements over the last four years. Timed to coincide with the passage of the Housing Act, 1949, the first major piece of housing legislation passed by a Labour government since 1930, *Housing Progress* proclaimed that in just four years more than half a million homes had been built, the vast majority of them council houses.⁵ Not only had these new homes rehoused three and a quarter million people, this had not, Aneurin Bevan wrote in the foreword, been "at the expense of quality." On the contrary, he argued that these homes were "bigger, better, and better-looking than their prewar counterparts." Bevan attributed this success, despite persistent shortages of men, material, and money, to the "skilful design and ingenuity" of local authorities and their architects. *Housing Progress* concluded by celebrating these new homes, whether they were maisonettes, three-bedroom houses, or single-person flats, as modern, original, and beneficent contributions to the nation's urban scene. *Housing Progress* aimed to show that the Labour government was taking real steps to bring into being what Bevan called the "necessary biological background for modern life and...the enrichment of every member of the community."⁶

The goal invoked by Bevan here – a biologically sound, productive community of equals – was written into postwar housing policy, which was quite literally intended to be the foundation of Britain's new social democracy. Housing policy was designed to make the inhabitants of council housing into what I call *English Social Democrats*, shorthand for white Fordist nuclear families who would power Britain's industry, benefit from the new social services and, ultimately, participate in the political and cultural life of the nation as equal

¹ Catherine Flinn, "'The City of Our Dreams?' The Political and Economic Realities of Rebuilding Britain's Blitzed Cities," *Twentieth Century British History* 23, no. 2 (2012): 221-245; John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970* (1978. London: Methuen, 1980), 277.

² Susanne Cowan, "A Model for the Nation: Exhibiting Post-war Reconstruction at the Festival of Britain," in *Exhibitions and the Development of Modern Planning Culture* ed. Robert Freestone and Marco Amati (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 178.

³ Tatsuya Tsubaki, "Planners and the Public: British Popular Opinion on Housing During the Second World War," *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 83-84.

⁴ 462 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1949) col. 2126.

⁵ Ministry of Health, *Housing Progress* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949).

⁶ H.C. Parl. Deb. 16 March 1949 5th series vol. 462 col. 2126.

members for the first time. Instead of being confined to overcrowded slums and drab backstreets, Britain's working men and their families would go forth from well-planned, spacious estates, all well-connected to the town, the city, and the nation, to learn, work, and play. The disciplinary ethos that had had been written into council housing from its inception as a project to create a 'fit Imperial race' was repurposed in service of a vision no less gendered or racialized, but this time, instead of imperial power, the goal was creating social democracy in Britain. In a way that no previous housing policy had been intended to do, the policy developed between 1942 and 1949 and put into practice from 1945 onwards was designed to extend the ability to live comfortable, healthy lives in communities integrated into national life to the average English working man and his family.

Housing policy's vision of the English social democrat touched the lives of a far larger and more heterogenous group of Britons than ever before. There were two major reasons for this, the first of which was, of course, the housing situation in which Britain found itself. The wartime halt in new house building, bomb damage, and hundreds of thousands of demobilized servicemen pushed Britain into an acute housing shortage. Thousands of people crowded into homes with family and friends or continued to live in sub-standard or damaged dwellings, of which there were some four million.⁷ Edinburgh found in 1946 that the rate of overcrowding in the city for houses rented for less than £45 per annum was 14.6% while Liverpool nine years later was still finding sub-standard dwellings, of which there were nearly ten thousand in the central area of the city alone, housed "on average, one-and-one-third families."⁸ In addition to these conditions of scarcity, local authorities assumed a much larger role as developers than they had before the war. Housebuilding was unprofitable for private builders until well into the 1950s thanks to a combination of labour and material shortages, as well as stricter planning laws that limited private development in favour of public.⁹ Particularly before the Conservative government began to restrict local authorities' role in the general housing market from 1954, but even afterwards local authorities were often the largest, and sometimes the only, builders of homes in their districts.¹⁰

The second reason council housing became relevant to many more Britons was legal and political. The two most important changes to housing law and policy after the war were the deletion of the phrase 'for the working classes' almost completely from the law of housing and the provision of subsidies for local authorities to build for 'general needs', both contained in the Housing Act, 1949.¹¹ Up to that point council housing had been legally restricted to the 'working classes' and while local authorities did not lose their existing statutory duties to abate overcrowding and rehouse occupants of dwellings unfit for habitation, after the Housing Act

⁷ Labour Party, *Housing Progress Report* (London, 1947), Bishopsgate Institute (hereafter BGI) LEECH/3/1; A. M. Carr-Saunders, D. Caradog Jones and C. A. Moser, *A Survey of Social Conditions in England and Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 37-38; Hilda Jennings, *Societies in the Making: A Study of Development and Redevelopment Within a County Borough* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 121.

⁸ Scottish Housing Advisory Committee (hereafter SHAC), *Choosing Council Tenants: A Report by the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee on Local Authorities' Methods of Allocating Tenancies* (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), 17; Joint Report of the Medical Officer of Health and the City Architect and the Director of Housing, *Programme of Slum Clearance and Central Area Redevelopment*, 1955, Liverpool Records Office (hereafter LRO) H 643 HOU.

⁹ Peter Weiler, "The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives' 'Grand Design for Housing', 1951-64," *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 127-130.

¹⁰ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 277; Brian Lund, *Understanding Housing Policy*, 3rd ed. (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), 33-34.

¹¹ A. Norman Schofield, and John F. Garner, *Housing Law and Practice* (London: Shaw & Sons, 1950), 7.

became law on 30 July 1949 they could build for anyone they pleased. In addition, the subsidy for general needs meant that local authorities were no longer subsidised solely for redevelopments replacing cleared slums. The removal of the stipulation that council housing be for the working classes only and the 1949 Act's gift of both power and funding to local authorities to build for 'general needs' made real Labour's commitment to the new, equal, fair Britain that was symbolized by their call for 'a separate dwelling for every family.'¹²

Despite these changes to the framework of housing policy, as historians of policy remind us, the mechanism of housing policy was *not* subjected to root-and-branch reforms. Rather, it was retained unchanged from the interwar period.¹³ Unlike health and education, for example, where the reforms of the social-democratic era dramatically altered not only *what* services were provided, but also how they reached the public and who qualified, when it came to housing politicians and policy-makers elected to keep the framework that had been enacted first in 1890: local authority-provided rental accommodation, complemented by slum clearance. This is notable, for the immediate postwar years were a moment when the whole question of social provision was held up for radical reconsideration around the world. Housing provision was a key part of this international conversation, especially in Europe where hundreds of cities were lying in ruins, and metropolitan Britain was by no means exempt from the swirling debates over social provision, equality, and fairness in housing, health, work, and education.¹⁴ It is also important because scholars of policy have faulted Britain's model of local authority provision for exacerbating, or even causing, the problems of poor maintenance, poor management, disrepair, and, ultimately, poverty and stigma that began to plague council estates from the 1960s on.¹⁵

Thus, rather than asking why politicians and planners *did not* undertake radical reform of housing policy in the charged atmosphere of the later 1940s, we should ask what possibilities an expanded framework of local authority provision offered that made them decide to keep it.¹⁶ These possibilities were nothing short of the ability to *make* the English social democrats planners imagined as the ideal inhabitants of social-democratic Britain. The statutory law of council housing and slum clearance contained unique powers over the people who came within its ambit. Local authority provision of rental housing, and slum clearance, relied on intense, local, personal knowledge gathering about the families to be housed. The standard of 'need,' first put to work in the 1930s, was interpreted in service of the new goal of creating English social democrats. From the late 1940s until the mid-1960s local authorities sifted council housing applicants, evaluating each family's need, and using their powers to place them in the right kind

¹² Ministry of Reconstruction, *Housing*, 1945, Cmd. 6609, 2.

¹³ Peter Malpass, "The Wobbly Pillar? Housing and the British Postwar Welfare State," *Journal of Social Policy* 32, no. 4 (2003): 500-603; see also Schofield and Garner, *Housing Law and Practice*, 4-7.

¹⁴ See e.g. Rosemary Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Tony Judt, *Postwar: a History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Ministry of Housing and Local Government reports frequently included summaries of British participation in international housing congresses see e.g. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Report for the Period 1950/51 to 1954*, 1955, Cmd. 9559, 18; *Report for the Year 1955, 1956*, Cmd. 9876, 21.

¹⁵ Malpass, "Wobbly Pillar?" 591-93; Peter Shapely, *The Politics of Housing: Power, Consumers and Urban Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), introduction.

¹⁶ Harriet Jones, "'This is Magnificent!': 300,000 houses a year and the Tory revival after 1945," *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 99-121; Peter M. Scott, and James T. Walker, "'Stop-go' policy and the restriction of postwar British house-building," *Economic History Review* 72, 2 (2018): 1-22; Alistair Kefford, "Housing the Citizen-Consumer in Post-war Britain: The Parker Morris Report, Affluence and the Even Briefer Life of Social Democracy," *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 2 (2018): 225-258.

of housing to make them English social democrats. The goal of a ‘fit imperial race’ espoused by those who made the law of council housing up until 1939 was no longer tenable, but the goal of an English social democrat was. The decision to use council housing to make English social democrats created, relied on, and propelled a vast knowledge-production regime that would persist long after that particular goal had been abandoned.

The English social democrat was an imaginary figure. Probably no family in council housing ever embodied the planners’ vision completely, but nevertheless many men and women around the country were involved in seeking them out. Legislation and policy were set at the national level but local authorities, both elected officials and local government employees, were the people responsible for bringing that policy to life. Nor did the aims and methods of national politicians and their local counterparts always align and so, to that end, there was a third player in housing law and policy whose role was to advise, interpret and generally bridge the gap between national and local. The Central Housing Advisory Committee (CHAC) and the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC) had been created under the Housing Act, 1936 and begun work when war broke out, but when they were reconstituted towards the end of the war their remit grew.¹⁷ They were quasi-political bodies – members of Parliament chaired and sat on them, as did party activists with relevant experience, and they reported to the Minister of Health, subsequently the Minister of Housing and Local Government, or in SHAC’s case the Secretary of State for Scotland – but they were research bodies too. Staffed by career civil servants, CHAC and SHAC co-opted housing professionals, sociologists, public health specialists, and town planners, most of whom were men, or the occasional woman with experience in politics, housing charities, or social reform; they absorbed research from outside experts and conducted their own. Together CHAC and SHAC produced over twenty reports between 1945 and 1975. They explained and interpreted legislation and the duties of local authorities, they provided commentary on regulations, and they disseminated best practices. These reports, and the research that went into them, made CHAC and SHAC the major official producers of knowledge about council housing in Britain.

CHAC and SHAC’s influence went further than the recommendations they made. The modes of knowledge production they used were derived from liberal politics of state reform in the nineteenth century and those modes were adopted by the local authorities below them.¹⁸ CHAC, SHAC and local authorities compiled statistical information; they created questionnaires; and they collected evidence, oral and written, from other government entities, from housing associations (non-profit housing companies) and other charitable organisations, industry groups and, on occasion, from individuals who had the right kind of ‘experience’ to speak to a given problem. All of this was an attempt to achieve ‘impartiality’ and ‘disinterest’ in their reports, qualities reserved for knowledge produced in particular ways by particular people – elite white men – because those qualities endowed the producers of that knowledge with credibility, authenticity, and power.¹⁹ This chapter rests primarily on the reports written by CHAC and SHAC, on the evidence they collected, and on local authorities’ endeavours in the same

¹⁷ Housing Act, 1936 s.135; see also Sub-Committee on Design of Dwellings Circulated Papers, TNA/HLG 37/63.

¹⁸ O. McDonagh, “The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal,” *The Historical Journal* 1 no. 1 (1958): 52-67; Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom* (London: Verso, 2003).

¹⁹ Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the Housing Management Sub-Committee, Central Housing Advisory Committee, 1 October 1948. TNA/HLG 37/84. Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

direction. This does not allow us in any way to access the thoughts or feelings of anyone who actually *was* a council tenant at this moment, but it does allow us to see why housing policy took the forms that it did.

Part I.i: The Social-Democratic Family

To complement the Housing Act, 1949, the Scottish burgh of Saltcoats released a new handbook for their tenants.²⁰ They took as their epigraph some lines of a sixteenth-century English theologian:

*A lytle house wel fylled
A lytle ground wel tyllid
And a lytle wife wel willed is best*

Saltcoats' epigraph summed up the family around which postwar housing policy was designed: a heterosexual nuclear family with a male breadwinner working a stable job and a wife to run his household. Housing was not unique in this respect; the "androcentric" Fordist family model was the ideal of all western postwar welfare states and a feature of postwar political culture across the economically-developed west.²¹ Historians and sociologists have shown that this ideal was rarely achieved by real families but it remained the basis of many nations' economic and welfare policies, as well as a cultural standard used to enforce gender and racial norms throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s.²² The homes laid out in Labour's postwar plans were to be the homes of the people who were the backbone of the new industrial democracy: the male head of the household and, behind him, his wife and children.

The postwar council house was a space designed around the imagined gender roles of the Fordist nuclear family, its preferred occupants. The siting of estates was considered in relation to the local labour market and local industry, for the husband's job, but also in terms of convenience to his wife in performing her duties: walking children to and from school and shopping for the family's needs. Inside the home, higher-quality fittings and the changes in housing design required to accommodate them were justified by politicians and policy-makers on the grounds that women had experienced high-quality fitout and design in wartime factory work and "have become intolerant of inferior conditions in their own homes."²³ When architects and planners came to consider storage they discussed whether it was more important for the workman to be able to store his bicycle, which he would use to get to work, inside the house or for the mother have an easily accessible space for the pram so that she would be more likely to take the baby out for regular fresh air and exercise, good for both of them.²⁴ The kitchen in particular, as the room that planners and architects agreed the wife and mother would spend most

²⁰ Saltcoats Town Council, *Burgh of Saltcoats Council Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, n.d.; reissued 1961-2), British Library (hereafter BL) 8287.ccc.15.

²¹ Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56 (March-April 2009): 101-02.

²² Pat Thane, "Family Life and 'Normality' in Postwar British Culture," in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 198; Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 no. 2 (2005), 351. Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

²³ Central Housing Advisory Committee, *Design of Dwellings*, (London: HMSO, 1944), 10.

²⁴ Evidence from Association of Municipal Councils; Birmingham Corporation; Liverpool Corporation; National Housing and Town Planning Council; Newcastle City Council collated in *Analysis of Evidence*, Paper P. D. 1., October 1942, TNA/HLG 37/63.

of her time in, had to be airy, light and functional, and CHAC recommended that architects give a clear sight line from the kitchen to the garden, both because it would be more pleasant for the housewife, and because it would make it easy for her to keep an eye on her children playing in the garden while she was working.²⁵

As well as gender *roles*, architects and planners paid attention to the kind of family relations they wanted their homes to create. They debated whether to privilege family togetherness by giving houses a dining room where the whole family could eat together or to make the kitchen big enough to eat in so that the father could have an early breakfast alone before setting off to work and the children could have afternoon tea after school.²⁶ The debate between Ministry of Health planners over whether the larger three-bedroom council houses should have a parlour *and* a living room, or just one large living room was not only a question of cost, but revolved around the gendered ways each member of the family was imagined to engage with each other and the wider world. Proponents of one large room explained that this would give the family space to rest and relax together after their respective days at work and school, something that overcrowded slum homes had never had, and which had, reformers were convinced, contributed to dysfunctional working-class families with fathers who spent all their time at the pub, exhausted mothers, and children running wild in the streets.²⁷ Supporters of *two* rooms used the same logic to argue that smaller separate rooms would enable children to do their homework in one quiet room while their mother did her mending or chatted with friends in the other; and that a second room would allow the husband space to relax after work, to keep up with current affairs by listening to the wireless, or to discuss union matters with friends and workmates without being disturbed by his wife's domestic labour of doing the dishes and putting the children to bed.²⁸ The 1949 Act also included, for the first time, a provision that allowed local authorities to sell (either outright or through hire purchase) furniture to their tenants, because, as CHAC wrote in *Unsatisfactory Tenants*, "It is little use having additional bedrooms if there is still only one bed for the whole family, and if better meals are to be provided not only are pans and plates necessary but chairs to sit on while eating."²⁹

Council housing was designed around the Fordist nuclear family because it was to be the home of the men who would build social-democratic Britain, reviving and rehabilitating its industry.³⁰ The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the War Office, and the Home Office all issued guidance to local authorities asking them to give priority to "agricultural workers, miners and key workers", to servicemen and sailors of the Merchant Navy, to the staff of the new National Health Service, midwives, district nurses and health visitors, and

²⁵ Evidence from Manchester Corporation; Royal College of Physicians; National Housing and Town Planning Council; London County Council; National Council for Social Service; Women's Gas Council; Newcastle; Sanitary Inspectors' Association collated in Analysis of Evidence, Paper P. D. 1., October 1942, TNA/HLG 37/63.

²⁶ CHAC, *Design of Dwellings*, 13; Evidence from Manchester Corporation; Royal College of Physicians; National Housing and Town Planning Council; London County Council; National Council for Social Service; Women's Gas Council; Newcastle; Sanitary Inspectors' Association collated in Analysis of Evidence, Paper P. D. 1., October 1942, TNA/HLG 37/63.

²⁷ See e.g. George Sims, *How the Poor Live* (1881. London: Chatto & Windus, 1889); Helen Bosanquet, *The Poor Law Report of 1909* (London: Macmillan, 1909); Richard Reiss, *The Home I Want* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919) and chs. 1 and 2.

²⁸ Evidence from Association of Municipal Corporations; Liverpool Corporation; Manchester Corporation; Newcastle City Council; Royal College of Physicians; Wellington Council; Lady Sanderson; Birmingham Corporation collated in Analysis of Evidence, Paper P. D. 1., October 1942, TNA/HLG 37/63.

²⁹ Housing Act, 1949, 12 & 13 Geo. 6, c. 60, s. 8; CHAC, *Unsatisfactory Tenants* (London: HMSO, 1955), 16.

³⁰ David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 3.

to policemen.³¹ Local authorities complied; Caerphilly, south Wales, allocated 200 houses to miners when their first postwar scheme was completed in 1951 and others, like Kidderminster in the industrial west Midlands, designed their application schemes to give preference to men whose skills matched the needs of local employers. Housing programs were not directed only by the Ministry of Health/Ministry of Housing and carried out by local authorities either; when the National Coal Board designated several Welsh coalfields for increased production in 1951, they worked with the local authorities to coordinate the labour and materials needed to expand the authorities' building programs and reimbursed them for the extra expenses they incurred when they had to ramp up their housing programs quickly to house incoming miners.³² Holding a job that suited the economic needs of the district in question was one of the only ways that families could circumvent residential qualifications and other criteria that restricted entry into council housing. A nationwide shortage of agricultural labour meant that rural authorities more frequently waived residential qualifications for applicants than their urban counterparts and they more often accepted employment in the district in lieu of residence.³³ Even Gateshead, part of the conurbation of industrial towns around Newcastle-upon-Tyne, made an exception to their refusal to accept employment in lieu of four years' residence in the town for "key workers of new firms moving into the district" despite a 9,000-person waiting list and a badly overcrowded population.³⁴

The link between council housing and the industrial economy went as far as the new towns, which in many ways were like large council estates, as most of the housing was publicly owned by the new town development corporations.³⁵ The Ministry of Labour, new town authorities and the local authorities of older districts surrounding the new towns chose applicants via the Industrial Selection Scheme, which aimed to match the needs of industry for labour with applicants in poor housing. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government gave an estimate in 1955 of projected factory employment in the new towns and concluded, "There is every reason

³¹ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants* (London: HMSO, 1949), 4; Oral evidence from the Admiralty, Air Ministry and War office given to Housing Management Sub-Committee 1 October 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29; War Office memo, Housing Management Sub-Committee on Residential Qualifications, August 1954. TNA/HLG 37/30; Housing Management Sub-Committee Minutes of Meeting 8 October 1954, item 4, TNA/HLG 37/29; Ministry of Information, "Building Scotland's New Houses," 8 November 1943. British Pathé Film ID: 2911.16. Accessed August 31, 2022, <https://youtu.be/XQ4qGED1d74>; SHAC, *Choosing Council Tenants*, 24; LCC Housing Liabilities and Available Accommodation, 1956: Report by the Architect, Valuer and the Director of Housing ref. Hg. 192, item 29, LCC/LMA/CC/CH/M/42/004. This was also the case in the new towns; Cumbernauld, outside Glasgow, sold some of its houses to Dunbartonshire Joint Police Committee who then rented to officers working in the new town. *Reports of the Cumbernauld, East Kilbride, and Glenrothes Development Corporations for the Year Ended 31st March, 1961* HC. 272 (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1961), 15.

³² Cmd. 9559, 119; Cmd. 9876, 92.

³³ Analysis of Information Supplied by Local Authorities up to 18 August 1954, Housing Management Sub-Committee on Residential Qualifications, August 1954. TNA/HLG 37/30. See also SHAC, *Choosing Council Tenants* 13; and oral evidence given to the Housing Management Sub-Committee by Mr Clayden, Housing Manager, and Mr Chappell, of Lewisham Borough Council, 7 September 1954; meeting of the Housing Management Sub-Committee 3 November 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29.

³⁴ Evidence given to the Housing Management Sub-Committee by Mr Smith, Housing Manager, Gateshead, 7 September 1954. TNA/HLG 37/29.

³⁵ Mark Clapson, "The English New Towns Since 1946: What are the Lessons of Their History for Their Future?" *Histoire urbaine* 3, no. 50 (2017), 13. See also Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), in which he argues that Milton Keynes, one of the last new towns was a form of 'welfare state modernism' and Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia* on the transformative vision of the future contained in the idea of the new town.

to expect that jobs and houses will march in step.”³⁶ The Greater London Council (GLC) explained in a promotional pamphlet, “The Council’s aim is to help Londoners who have both housing need and some industrial skill. The intention is that these Londoners shall work *and* live in the new and expanding towns...even those who lack this skill and are willing to be trained can register...But since employers prefer skilled men, and houses and jobs go together, an unskilled man’s chances are smaller than a skilled man’s.”³⁷ The Ministry of Labour, the ‘exporting’ authorities and development corporations of the new towns worked together on the Scheme to such an extent that Leyton, east London, admitted in 1954 that they were using their waiting list primarily as a register of families eligible for the Scheme, while Lewisham, south London, would not accept applications to the Scheme from anyone not on their housing list.³⁸ The Industrial Selection Scheme would balance housing need and the needs of employers, at a stroke alleviating congestion in older districts and turning new towns into hubs of productive industry populated by skilled men and their families.

From the inside out, then, the council house was designed for a nuclear family, and not only for a nuclear family, to enable that nuclear family to participate in the economic life of the nation in particular ways. The father, the breadwinner, would live in a house conveniently located for his employment, whether that be with a ‘new firm’, part of the industrial revival of Britain, or as a ‘key worker’ in mining or agriculture, or as a public servant of some kind, as policemen, for example, sometimes received preferred allocations. The mother would be a consumer – increasingly likely to be a member of the affluent society chronicled by Alistair Kefford and Claire Langhamer – but she would also be living in a house that would enable her to perform her primary duties as a caregiver in ease and comfort.³⁹ Last but not least, the children, again living in homes close to their schools, would have education, fresh air, and exercise – all of which would help them form a sound ‘biological background’ to modern life.

Part I.ii: *English Social Democrats*

As the foundation of this ‘biological background’ of modern life, council housing was created to integrate its residents into a racialized tradition of Englishness, one identified by Paul Gilroy as “simultaneously biological and cultural.”⁴⁰ Before the Second World War proponents of council housing had been frank about its role in creating a “fit Imperial race.”⁴¹ But while postwar council housing in general, and slum clearance in particular, retained its role as a

³⁶ Cmd. 9559, 97 cf. p. 70; Cmd. 9876, 49-50.

³⁷ Greater London Council, “A Home and A Job: Opportunities for Londoners in the New and Expanding Towns,” c. 1965. LMA/ACC/1888/036.

³⁸ CHAC, *Residential Qualifications* (London: HMSO, 1955), 8-9. Analysis of Information Supplied by Local Authorities up to 18 August 1954, Housing Management Sub-Committee on Residential Qualifications, August 1954. TNA/HLG 37/30; Lewisham did, however, forward those applications to the LCC. Oral evidence given to the Housing Management Sub-Committee by Mr Clayden, Housing Manager of Lewisham Borough Council, and Mr Chappell, R.Q.E. fourth meeting 7 September 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29.

³⁹ Kefford, “Housing the Citizen-Consumer,” 225-258; Langhamer, “Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain,” 341-362.

⁴⁰ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 45. See also Stuart Hall, Chas Crichton, Tony Jefferson et. al., *Policing the Crisis* (1978. London: Macmillan, 1982). For work exploring the centrality of race to Englishness or Britishness Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me* (2015); Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (1998. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

⁴¹ See e.g., “Mr Lloyd George on his Task,” *The Times*, November 25, 1918.

racialized project of public health, the consensus built among the liberal-left elite in the interwar years was that housing should be a project of cultural assimilation of the working classes into their ‘natural’ cultural heritage as English, Scottish or Welsh. Not only had the Holocaust had made rhetoric of an imperial race untenable, in keeping with the social-democratic emphasis on the dignity of the working man, policymakers understood council housing as allowing its residents to access the culture that was their birthright and, in the aggregate, had made Britain what it was.⁴² Offering a democratised version of a traditional English house and garden, or its Scottish equivalent, housing policy was designed to diffuse whiteness across the working class.

Our Gardens, published by CHAC in 1948 opened, “Britain’s landscape is one of her proudest possessions – a source of inspiration to her people, and of renown abroad,” and “neat, well-planted gardens make all the difference to most houses, so really, ‘it all depends on you.’”⁴³ It concluded with the exhortation, “Let us all take pride in the surroundings of our homes: for beauty is our rightful heritage only if we ourselves seek it and cherish it.”⁴⁴ The idea of a ‘traditional’ style of English gardening, that it was part of English heritage and should be continued by English people, and that it was something the nation was famous for, ran through the booklet. Unlike other material by CHAC which was detailed, technical, and intended for local authorities’ housing departments, *Our Gardens* was lavishly illustrated and clearly intended for a general readership. It was also only one of many booklets, brochures, and pamphlets produced by central and local governments that made a point of celebrating the Englishness of the new council housing. Local councils and national politicians emphasised a district’s history of slum clearance and municipal building when they opened new estates and continued the interwar practice of giving estates and the new streets within them names that spoke to a particular version of the area’s past, whether the bucolic, ‘Cantril Farm’, ‘Lyme Grove’, or the imperial, ‘West India House.’⁴⁵ Presenting council housing as a new iteration of already existing heritage occurred in Scotland too, as SHAC wrote that tenements were “widely regarded as Scotland’s most characteristic type of dwelling” and asked, “are we ready to take the further step to the development of modern flats properly equipped with modern services...?”⁴⁶ As in England, council housing, whether that be modern cottages or modern communal living in the form of tenements, were to be the newest addition to the Scottish urban landscape, built by Scots for Scots.⁴⁷

⁴² On the historical roots of the dignity of the working man and its links to an English identity see Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), particularly McClelland’s essay “England’s Greatness: The Working Man,” 71-118.

⁴³ CHAC, *Our Gardens* (London: HMSO, 1948), 1, 3.

⁴⁴ CHAC, *Our Gardens*, 4.

⁴⁵ St. Pancras Borough Council, “St. Pancras of the Future” exhibition booklet, 1945, BL/08286.dd.86; Enfield Urban District Council, *Official Opening of the First Permanent Council House Completed Since the Termination of the 1939-45 War*, 1946, Wellcome Collection (hereafter WELL) P9911; Metropolitan Borough of Stepney, *Souvenir of the Official Opening of West India House, West India Dock Road, E14 by the Prime Minister*. (London: Metropolitan Borough of Stepney, 1946), BGI/LEECH/3/1; Borough of Ilford, *A Housing Review: 1945-1949*, BL/Cup.1246.c3; Hammersmith & Fulham Borough Council, *Official Opening of Frithville Hybrid Flats*, 1949 Hammersmith and Fulham Local Studies and Archives (hereafter HFA) H728.2 FRI; City of Liverpool Housing Committee, *Housing Progress, 1864-1951* (Liverpool: City of Liverpool Housing Committee, 1951), LRO/H 643 HOU; London County Council, *East End Housing* (London: London County Council c. 1963), 4-8, WELL/P3721; London County Council, introduction to *200,000 Homes* (London: Greater London Council, 1965), LMA/GLC/DG/PUB/01/002/0035.

⁴⁶ SHAC, *Planning Our New Homes* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1944), Plate IV.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Information, “Building Scotland’s New Houses,” 8 November 1943. British Pathé Film ID: 2911.16. Accessed August 31, 2022 <https://youtu.be/XQ4qGED1d74>.

New emphasis was also laid on housing for older people, and these tenants, who could not be understood as families of future social democrats, were instead imagined as performing a cultural service for their estates. Representing postwar housing as sites that would allow more Englishmen and their families to access their essential Englishness gave the elderly a new place in the schema of council housing, as planners began to understand them as repositories of memories and culture for their communities. The London County Council (LCC) worked hard, when describing new high-rise estates in east London, to show that elderly residents like “Mrs R.” who had been rehoused and lived happily with her daughter and their “spotless kitchen” only three-quarters of a mile from her old neighbours.⁴⁸ Better housing would allow these older people to remain active members of their communities for as long as possible, as the LCC explained how her comfortable new flat was well-lit enough that Mrs R. could continue her old trade of sewing aprons.⁴⁹ Plans for estates mingled maisonettes, one-bedroom flats, and bedsits with two- and three-bedroom flats and houses, the better to ensure that older people could participate in the life of their estate as much as possible.⁵⁰ *East End Housing* included a photograph of a beaming stall-holder at the Chrisp Street market, just near their new flat on the Lansbury estate, explaining that this woman’s mother had had held the stall before her and her son was now working there too.⁵¹ The importance attached to balanced communities, balanced not just by occupation, as Bevan had invoked with his ‘lovely feature of English and Welsh villages’, but also by age, completed the vision of the new housing estates as organic wholes. They were to be nurturing spaces for the older and younger generations of Britons, ensuring that culture and heritage would be revitalized, preserved, and passed on.

If council estates were spaces that offered access to English heritage, then, just as the council home was designed to encourage gendered participation in the industrial economy, in order to access their natural English heritage tenants would need to adopt new forms of behaviour to access that heritage fully. Aneurin Bevan wrote in the foreword to *Our Gardens*, “we all have a part to play” in protecting gardens and making new ones so, “I therefore commend this little book in the hope that it will help us all to maintain in the surroundings and the settings of our homes that tradition of good gardening of which our country has always been proud.”⁵² *Our Gardens* stressed that ordinary English men and women could take part in England’s gardening tradition even if they did not have a garden – planting climbing vines over blocks of flats and window boxes were in the spirit of the endeavour.⁵³ Local authorities were instructed by the Ministry of Health to ensure that public spaces and gardens were well maintained and to run events like gardening competitions in order to “encourage the tenant’s pride and interest both in his own garden and in other trees upon the estate” and ultimately, “to encourage a communal interest in the appearance of a street or neighbourhood.”⁵⁴ The wave of nearly-identical tenants’ handbooks published in the wake of the 1949 Act showed that in this respect local authorities were following the central government’s advice. Like *Our Gardens*, handbooks mixed advice with photographs showing green, leafy, and spacious estates with tidy gardens, those photographs were often set against photographs of run-down gardens, and

⁴⁸ LCC, *East End Housing*, 10-11.

⁴⁹ LCC, *East End Housing*, 11-12.

⁵⁰ City of Plymouth: Town Clerk’s Report into Post-War Housing, 1960, Plymouth Archives (hereafter PLY) 712/2/10.

⁵¹ LCC, *East End Housing*, 16-17.

⁵² Aneurin Bevan, foreword to CHAC, *Our Gardens*.

⁵³ CHAC, *Our Gardens*, 22.

⁵⁴ CHAC, *The Appearance of Housing Estates*, (London: HMSO, 1948), 13-16.

decaying, cramped, treeless streets.⁵⁵ It was, according to the tenants' handbooks, the responsibility of the tenants to maintain their estates because, according to Saltcoats, in Scotland, "Houses built by the Town Council are part of an effort to improve the Housing Conditions of the Community... *One unsatisfactory tenant, one neglected garden, can destroy this object,*" the object of – in style and substance – of an aesthetically pleasing, neat, regular, recognisably English – or Scottish – community.⁵⁶

As well as the ways in which council housing was a new Englishness available to working-class families, policymakers stressed that the key contribution to this Englishness that council housing would make was not so much the home and the garden itself, but the fact that it was not a slum. Council housing was celebrated as rational, planned, and tasteful contributions to Britain's cities and towns as contrasted to 'sprawl', 'ribbon development', or "ugly and venomous slums."⁵⁷ The Ministry of Health, for example, explained that new postwar terraces were part of a long tradition of terrace housing ("Terrace housing has always been a feature of the English town"), and allied the new postwar terrace houses with the "sound terrace tradition", as contrasted to the "abuse" of the style in the latter half of the nineteenth century when "tall, ugly and inconvenient terraces were built."⁵⁸ This was a postwar continuation of a long history, in both writing and in visual media, of contrasting slums – and slum people – with everything that they were not.⁵⁹ This sentiment was reproduced in children's literature: Richard Bowood's *The Story of Houses and Homes* (1963), published as part of Ladybird's 'Achievements' series, described council houses, which received their own page, just like Tudor, Queen Anne, and Regency houses, as "good small houses with all the modern advantages" while slums, which also received their own page, were "mean, small and ugly houses, a disgrace to the times."⁶⁰ The new estates going up around the country were, in the telling of the Ministry of Health, additions to and enhancements of a pre-existing architectural heritage and offered a way into that heritage for slum dwellers, previously excluded from white Englishness. What made the postwar

⁵⁵ Borough of Dagenham, *Dagenham Municipal Housing Estates: Tenants Handbook 1949* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1949), BL/W.P.13778; Borough of Slough, *The Council Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1949), BL/W.P.13776; Borough of Woolwich, *Woolwich: The Municipal Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1949), BL/W.P.13772; Brierley Hill Urban District Council, *The Municipal Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1949), BL-8287.ccc.27; Saltcoats, *Council Tenants' Handbook*, BL/8287.ccc.15; Atherton Urban District Council, *The Council Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1950), BL/8287.de.1; City of Liverpool, *Municipal Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1952, 1962), LRO/H 643 HOU; Borough of Kidderminster, *Municipal Tenants' Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, n.d.), BL/W.P.13774; Sutton-in-Ashfield Urban District Council, *Tenants Handbook* (Gloucester: British Publishing Company, 1960), BL/8287.ccc.16.

⁵⁶ Foreword to Saltcoats *Council Tenants' Handbook*, 7.

⁵⁷ CHAC, *Moving From the Slums* (London: HMSO, 1956), 2; SHAC, *Distribution of Housing in Scotland*, 1943, Cmd. 6552, 15-18.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Health, *Housing Progress*, exhibit 2.

⁵⁹ See ch. 1 and 2; also Seth Koven on Dr. Barnardo's representation of children he 'rescued' from London slums. Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), ch. 4.

⁶⁰ Richard Bowood, *The Story of Houses and Homes*. Ladybird 'Achievements'. (Loughborough: Wills & Hepworth, 1963), 46, 40. This sentiment pervades British housing politics today, see architect Nigel Booen on the Conservative government's suggestion of a 'beauty calculator' measuring new designs against the 'classic' and beautiful eighteenth-century Georgian townhouses of Belgravia and Bath, "Would housing benefit from the use of a 'beauty calculator'?" *Inside Housing* 5 January 2024 < https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/comment/would-housing-benefit-from-the-use-of-a-beauty-calculator-84368?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=IH%20%2D%20THE%20LONG%20READ%20CAMPAIGN>, accessed 11 January 2024.

developments exciting was not, therefore, that they were unprecedented, but the way that they were social-democratic improvements on an existing English tradition of homes, now made available to all.⁶¹

Part I.iii: English Social Democrats

Council housing was designed to make English Fordist nuclear families. And, according to sociologists Michael Young and Peter Willmott, the planners succeeded. Their book *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) laid out their findings, one of which was that the “status” of families living on suburban council estates was “that of the family of marriage much more sharply” than it had been in the district the families originated from, overcrowded Bethnal Green, in London’s East End. Young and Willmott were not in favour of this development. *Family and Kinship* is a famous early articulation of an argument that was to become more common over the second half of the twentieth century, that mid-century redevelopments, especially slum clearance and rehousing, had destroyed long-established, mutually supportive working-class communities based around extensive kinship networks and replaced them with isolated single families suffering from acquisitiveness, anxiety, and anomie.⁶² But, Young and Willmott conceded, whatever problems had arisen on the new estates there was no going back: “the architects made the future at County Hall.”⁶³

Even though they did not intend it to be that comment of Young and Willmott’s was a vindication of everything that planners wanted for council housing. Where Young and Willmott mourned the loss of older networks of kith and kin, CHAC was blithe. “We believe that the majority [of families to be rehoused] are eager to enjoy the higher standards of the new estates,” they wrote in *Moving From the Slums*, which came out a year before *Family and Kinship*.⁶⁴ CHAC did acknowledge that “some people who have spent their lives in the gay hubbub of the city may hesitate at the prospect of adjusting themselves to the loneliness of the more rural estates,” but, “Difficulties of this kind cast deeper shadows with old people who lack the physical and mental resilience of younger families” who would be pleased with their spacious and modern new homes.⁶⁵ The new towns were criticised for the same reasons and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government struck a defensive note when they offered the same rebuttal, “Although much of this criticism has been ill-informed, it is undoubtedly true that a newcomer to a new town, moving perhaps from a congested London area, misses the cinemas, dance halls, theatres and the many other commercial and municipal facilities to which he has been accustomed... Yet the London new towns are probably better equipped with facilities for social

⁶¹ E.g. St. Pancras Borough Council, “St. Pancras of the Future,” BL/08286.dd.86; Enfield Urban District Council, *Official Opening*, WELL/P9911; Liverpool, *Liverpool Builds* (Liverpool: Public Relations Office of the City, 1967), 19-27.

⁶² Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957. New York: Routledge, 2011), 119, 132, 136; chs. IX and X. Similar criticisms were voiced in some of the evidence collected by CHAC; see e.g. summary of oral evidence of Dr Wofinden of Bristol, to Housing Management Sub-Committee, 30 April 1956, TNA/HLG 37/98 or, later, Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 4-5 and C. Jameson, “British Architecture: Thirty Wasted Years,” *Sunday Times* 6 February, 1977. Sam Wetherell considers neoliberal critiques of modernist architecture as causing crime and dysfunction in chapter four of *Foundations: How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁶³ Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, 132.

⁶⁴ CHAC, *Moving From the Slums*, 2. They retained this attitude as long as they could, see CHAC, *The Needs of New Communities* (London: HMSO, 1967), ch. 1.

⁶⁵ CHAC, *Moving From the Slums*, 3.

and recreational activities than many old towns...”⁶⁶ Planners envisaged council estates and new towns as doing away with all the informal practices of working-class life chronicled by Young and Willmott, of ‘speaking for’ and ‘putting names down’ as a way of getting jobs, homes, and everything in between. To politicians and planners, these tightly-enclosed systems born of hardship and necessity and reflected in miles of slum housing were cutting the working classes off – Bevan used the word “castrated” in debate – from full participation in the life of the wider community, and from there, the nation.⁶⁷

Council housing, as the home of the English working man and his family, was the first step in how social democracy was going to integrate the working classes into community and national life. Estate planning in miniature, and town planning at large, ought to foster “proper social well-being...to work out some organization of...physical form which will aid in every way the full development of community life and enable a proper measure of social amenities to be provided and arranged to advantage in each residential neighbourhood.”⁶⁸ The design of the home around a particular gendered division of labour in order to create a harmonious nuclear family was mirrored by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning’s assertion that siting of estates in relation to “industry, transport, and a whole host of other activities – that is as important as the provision of dwellings which are good in themselves.”⁶⁹ This approach was adopted by the Labour council of Plymouth, who, in their manifesto of 1949, called the construction of new houses “priority no. 1” but situated their achievements in the field of housing next to other major interventions in the built environment.⁷⁰ The Labour Party was clear that the council’s work in housing, even though it was the community’s most urgent need, was not to be understood as separate from other public service infrastructure being built, like new primary and secondary schools, rebuilding and extending transport roads, bridges, and railways, or providing new libraries, health clinics, and aged care facilities. In Plymouth, the expansion of council housing, slum clearance, and rehousing displaced populations was the most intimate expression of the work that the Labour council, and the national Labour government, were undertaking for the people, but it was only one of many.⁷¹

Once residents were in council housing, using the social services which the new welfare state was providing, they would be able to *live* social democracy. This was not only by new forms of behaviour, encapsulated in the admonitions of tenants’ handbooks to “Treat your house as if it were your own – because it is” and their ‘hints for the housewife’, it was also built into the house itself. The homes were deliberate manifestations of Britain’s managed, Keynesian, industrial economy, boosting, showcasing and representing the construction industry and its workers. Cumbernauld Development Corporation reported that in 1960 their town had been visited by nine MPs, CHAC’s Standards sub-committee, the Ministry of Works’ Joint Advisory Panel, the Housing Committee of the City of Sheffield, students and researchers from the universities of Glasgow, Dundee and Cambridge, and observers from Spain, Canada, Germany,

⁶⁶ Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Report for the Year 1958, 1959*, Cmnd. 737, 115.

⁶⁷ 414 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1945) col. 1222.

⁶⁸ CHAC, “Site Planning and Layout in Relation to Housing,” in *Design of Dwellings* (1944), 58. See also Cmd. 9876, 131.

⁶⁹ CHAC, “Site Planning and Layout,” in *Design of Dwellings*, 55. *Design of Dwellings* remained the blueprint for housing standards for both the public and private sector in the postwar period for the next decade and a half until it was superseded by another CHAC report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, the so-called Parker Morris Report of 1961.

⁷⁰ Labour Party of Plymouth, *Labour Party Manifesto: Achievement 1946-49* (Plymouth, 1949), PLY/2226.

⁷¹ Labour Party of Plymouth, *Manifesto*, PLY/2226.

India, Italy, Pakistan, Uruguay, and the United States.⁷² Facing this kind of observation, small wonder that planners and architects devoted great attention to the minutiae of housing design, from draining boards to refuse disposal systems, emphasising that the home was the domestic, individual, private manifestation of an industrial economy enjoying full employment: industry groups invited to give evidence to CHAC ranged from the British Lighting Council to the Women's Gas Council.⁷³ When council houses were actually built, the central government and local authorities celebrated the fact that the fittings of the new houses were made of British steel produced in British factories, that the electricity and heat were generated by British Coal; the gas was British gas; and that the work was done by British workers, sometimes under a new system of labour organisation, 'direct labour' where workmen were employed directly by the local authorities, instead of tendering to private contractors.⁷⁴

The overarching vision of an English social democrat turned council houses into flexible spaces because the aim was not shelter, but finding the home for each applicant that would allow them to reach their fullest potential. Families closest to the English social democrat ideal received offers for "new and up-to-date" homes whereas CHAC longed for "*intermediate*" housing, of a standard in between housing unfit for habitation and the newest estates houses for their "problem" families because that kind of home would offer the tenant room for improvement without requiring "a standard of living so much in advance of his [the tenant's] existing one as to make him despair of attaining it."⁷⁵ At the district level, planners spoke of 'decanting' overcrowded families from the inner city into the suburbs, while an 'overspill' population was one which had been rehoused on estates outside their original local authority's jurisdiction.⁷⁶ As well as London, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Wolverhampton and Walsall all undertook negotiations with surrounding local authorities and county councils for 'exporting' their overspill populations and were often successful.⁷⁷ The great estate of Kirkby, up till then a small town in Lancashire, was the result of Liverpool Corporation adopting "a policy of work and houses close together," and over four thousand homes had been built by the end of 1955, all for people from Liverpool.⁷⁸ Councillors from Camberwell, south London, complained to a parliamentary inquiry that their endeavours to equalize population density in their very unequal borough was like "trying to get a quart into a pint pot" and said, "if only we can get some modus operandi... we will get some way in which we can help nationally in the broader field outside local authority development by ensuring that houses can be adequately filled in

⁷² *Reports of the Cumbernauld...for the Year Ended 31st March, 1961* HC. 272, 11-12.

⁷³ CHAC, *Design of Dwellings*, 53; *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (1961), 90-91. Wetherell, *Foundations*, 88-90 especially on heating.

⁷⁴ CHAC; *Liverpool Builds*; Borough of Ilford, *A Housing Review: 1945-1949*; Enfield, *Official Opening*; Hammersmith & Fulham Borough Council, *Official Opening of Frithville Hybrid Flats*, 1949; Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Second Supplement to the Housing Manual* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1952), 12.; Liverpool, *Housing Progress*, 41; Hammersmith and Fulham Borough Council, *Official Housing Survey 1948*, HFA-H331.83 HAM; Cmd. 9559, 7.

⁷⁵ CHAC, *Unsatisfactory Tenants*, 14. See also Housing Management Sub-Committee Minutes of Meeting 18 March 1955, item 3.6, TNA/HLG 37/29.

⁷⁶ See TNA/HLG 98/101 and 98/107 for internal discussions on overspill populations at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. See also TNA/HLG 37/39 for commentary by Housing and Local Government civil servants calling for new committees to facilitate cooperation between housing and welfare authorities at the district, county and regional level, ref. 92051/5/90, May 1955. See also Cmd. 9559, ch. 5, esp. pp. 69-71.

⁷⁷ Cmd. 9876, 50-51; Cmnd. 737, Appendix XIV items G, H, I: reception of overspill population figures from London, Bristol and West Midlands conurbation respectively, 180-81.

⁷⁸ Cmd. 9876, 51.

terms of the need of the families that are in them.”⁷⁹ The goal of housing policy was integrating, smoothing, averaging, and equalizing these families across progressively larger areas – the borough, the city, the country. Each family who applied for a council house became part of this project.

Part II: Need and Knowledge Production: Assessing the Intangible

Part II.i: The Law of Housing Need

As soon as the war ended waiting lists for council housing exploded. They remained in the thousands in many places well into the 1950s, so much so that some local authorities stopped accepting new applications for years at a time, closed their lists to anyone who had not applied before a certain date, and admitted that some applicants had “no prospect” of becoming municipal tenants.⁸⁰ Neither existing council housing stock nor new building could match the crush of applications, so determining who to house and in what order became the most pressing issue local authorities’ housing departments faced. But the law of council housing gave them little assistance. The duties laid on local authorities by the Housing Acts of 1935 and 1936, retained without change in the 1949 and 1957 Housing Acts, were broad and imprecise.⁸¹ Local authorities were required to give preference to families living in insanitary conditions, which themselves remained undefined until 1954; to ‘large families’; and to families who were overcrowded as per standards that had been codified in the Housing Act, 1935.⁸² The duty to rehouse residents whose homes were condemned as part of slum clearance schemes also remained unchanged from 1935. Within these confines the Ministry of Health urged local authorities to house families whose housing need was greatest first.⁸³

The vague nature of their statutory obligations and the mass of applications they received gave local authorities great powers of selection. It also forced them to exercise them. Housing departments had to assess applicants to discover whether they fell into one or more of the categories of need that councils were obliged to house, exclusive of slum clearance; and they had

⁷⁹ Camberwell Borough Council evidence given to the London Housing Survey Committee (Milner Holland Committee), 19 TNA/HLG 39/68 pp. 11-12.

⁸⁰ London Housing Survey: Milner Holland Committee, “Research Papers: Questionnaire on Housing Stock to 87 Local Authorities in G.L.C. Area. Questions 6-9.” TNA/HLG 39/98; Oral evidence from Lewisham Borough Council, Wembley Borough Council, Gosport Borough Council, Gateshead Borough Council, and Manchester collected by the Housing Management Sub-Committee, Minutes of 4th Meeting held 7 September 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29; Minutes of the Tenancies Sub-Committee of the Manchester City Council Housing Committee, 14 July 1952 vol. 9 Manchester Central Library (hereafter MAN) GB127.Council Minutes/Housing (Tenancies) Sub-Committee/9. The City of Birmingham was reported to be considering closing their waiting list in February 2024, see James Riding, “England’s Largest Council Considers Closing Housing Waiting List,” *Inside Housing* 5 February 2024, accessed 7 February 2024, < https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/englands-largest-council-considers-closing-housing-waiting-list-84956?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=IH%20%2D%20COUNCIL%20FOCUS%20NEWSLETTER%20CAMPAIGN>.

⁸¹ Housing Act, 1949, 12 & 13 Geo. 6, c. 60; Housing Act, 1957, 5 Eliz. 2, c. 56.

⁸² Schofield and Garner, *Housing Law and Practice*, 1st ed., 6-7; Housing Act, 1936, 26 Geo. 5 & 1 Edw. 8, c. 51, s. 85; Housing Repairs and Rents Act, 2 Eliz. 2, c.53, 1954, s.9. Local authorities also acquired an obligation under the National Assistance Act, 1948, (Part III) to provide temporary accommodation for those in urgent need, which is to say those suddenly made homeless.

⁸³ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants*, 5; *Management of Housing Estates: Second Report* (London: HMSO, 1945), 5.

to rank applicants by housing need.⁸⁴ To do so councils added statutory forms of need to other, non-statutory categories each local authority developed themselves to create a picture of an applicant's general deservingness of a council house. Only then could applicants be chosen and offers made. Just as the vision of the English social democrat had produced council housing that was designed *for* certain kinds of families and was also supposed to *make* residents into those families, the allocation criteria local authorities developed looked for certain kinds of families and drove the housing managers to think about the applicants in front of them in particular ways.

All of this made council housing extremely political. Every politician involved in council housing, from the ministers who made housing policy, to the MPs and party activists of CHAC and SHAC who interpreted it, to local councillors who administered it, knew that allocations were a sensitive subject. CHAC wrote, "the success of any method [of selection] must be judged by the extent to which it ensures that the applicants selected are those in greatest need of a house, and that the basis of selection is understood and accepted as impartial by the public."⁸⁵ As with the processes of evidence collection adopted by CHAC, SHAC, and local authorities, so with allocations: these groups stressed that the goal behind allocation criteria was not merely 'impartiality' but *visible* impartiality, and fairness.⁸⁶ To steer local authorities away from allocation schemes that were inefficient, missed people in genuine need, or were liable to cause resentment among the public, CHAC provided a model points system in their handbook *Selection of Tenants* (1949).⁸⁷ The model was split into 'basic' and 'balancing' points so that it would perform the two functions every allocation system had to: identifying all the applicants who fell into the statutory categories of need and distinguishing between "cases of equal housing need" so as to give housing to the most deserving applicants first. Allocation criteria were where the goal of fairly apportioning council housing to applicants in need met the vision of the English social democrat. How local authorities structured their allocation criteria, and why, shows how the grand vision of a new English social democracy to take the place of the disintegrating empire was interpreted by the people tasked with putting it in place.

Part II.i: Basic Points: Learning the Applicant's Family

When they investigated allocation schemes in 1954 CHAC found that most of the major local authorities were using systems analogous to their model.⁸⁸ Council housing was no longer means tested but the hierarchy of need pushed applicants to describe their circumstances in ways that highlighted just how classed and gendered council housing really was. CHAC found that the 'basic' parts of points schemes revolved around the applicant's marital status, including when they were married, who applicants were living with, their standards of cleanliness, their health, especially whether they were tubercular or not, how many children they had, how old those children were, including whether the mother was pregnant or not (Sutton Coldfield, a suburb of Birmingham, phrased this as "expectant mother to count as one child"), and statutory

⁸⁴ See Ministry of Health circular 171/48, 10 November 1948 asking local authorities to send in information on how long their waiting lists were and instructing them to "classify...applications as far as possible to show the number of those without a separate home of their own," BGI/LEECH/3/1.

⁸⁵ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants*, 10.

⁸⁶ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants*, 9-12.

⁸⁷ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants*, 9-12.

⁸⁸ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants*, 10.

overcrowding.⁸⁹ Of the seven criteria Liverpool's Housing Committee chose to use to make up the 'physical housing need' score of each applicant when they revised their points scheme in 1954 only one, "occupancy of a sub-standard dwelling, or a dwelling lacking essential amenities", referred to the house itself. All the others, from "lack of a separate home", the first criterion, to "size of an applicant's family", the last, were about the family themselves.⁹⁰

Allocation schemes were based around managing the ill-health of applicants, keeping families together, and ensuring that the unemployed, the transient, or the deviant would not find a place on council estates, homes of the deserving. This lent a pathetic tone to applications. The application of Henrietta Ralfs, 86, living alone, was summarised by the Manchester Housing Committee in 1955 as "[Ralfs is] suffering from increasing general weakness and senility...has fallen down a number of times in her attempts" to go down the stairs from her current one-room flat.⁹¹ Applicants also presented their cases to speak to the place of council housing as the home of the sober, industrial working-class family. Emily Smith wrote to Manchester in early 1953 to ask that her husband's council tenancy be transferred to her name because he was an unstable alcoholic in and out of psychiatric wards. Smith wrote, "This sort of thing has been going on for years and I have to put up with it because I didn't want to leave my home. As you are only too well aware it is very difficult to get a place and there have been two children to consider (one is now married at 19 because of her father's conduct)." Smith explained the avenues she had explored to try to control her husband's behaviour and the advice she had sought from probation officers, psychiatrists, and solicitors, and concluded by emphasising again her reluctance to leave her home while she was still responsible for her son.⁹² Smith presented herself as a resourceful, capable, loyal wife and mother victimised by a "no-good drunkard." Her application was successful: the committee recommended her husband be served with a notice to quit and, once they were no longer living together, that Smith be offered the tenancy of a two-bedroom flat. Ralfs deserved council accommodation because she was a vulnerable elderly woman in poor health; Smith's request for her own tenancy was accepted because it would remove her son from his father's bad influence, as well as a troublemaker from the estate, and give Smith and her son a chance to live productive lives on their estate as they were supposed to do.

The forms of housing need experienced by Mrs Ralfs, Mrs Smith, and others – categories of need that were 'basic' but not necessarily statutory – were classed and gendered; but no category of housing need was so closely tied to the English heterosexual working family as overcrowding. Arising from fears that sexual deviancy among overcrowded families would lead to the degeneration of the imperial race, as discussed in previous chapters, overcrowding remained a matter of concern as, "the result of overcrowding and unsatisfactory housing is both

⁸⁹ Appendix to Paper S.T. 4. Central Housing Advisory Committee: Housing Management Sub-Committee: Memorandum by the Joint Secretaries: Selection of Tenants. Central Housing Advisory Committee: Sub-Committee on the Allocation and Re-Allocation of Tenancies: Evidence. TNA/HLG 37/85A.

⁹⁰ Special Sub-Committee and Housing Committee, City of Liverpool, "Proposed Revised Points Scheme," 26 February, 1954, p. 7. LRO/H 643 HOU.

⁹¹ Minutes of the Tenancies Sub-Committee of the Manchester City Council Housing Committee, 2 December 1955 vol. 10 MAN/GB127.Council Minutes/Housing (Tenancies) Sub-Committee/10. See also e.g. letter from Mr Oscar Pritchard to the Lord Mayor of Manchester, 27 July 1953 in Minutes of the Tenancies Sub-Committee of the Manchester City Council Housing Committee, 22 September 1953 vol. 9 MAN/GB127.Council Minutes/Housing (Tenancies) Sub-Committee/9.

⁹² Minutes of the Tenancies Sub-Committee of the Manchester City Council Housing Committee, 4 March 1953 vol. 9 MAN/GB127.Council Minutes/Housing (Tenancies) Sub-Committee/9.

hardship to the individual and loss to the community...both material and moral.”⁹³ The overcrowding standard of 1935-36 was designed to find families who deviated from the nuclear family model. Local authorities were not only obliged to house applicants who were overcrowded; they were required to survey their districts to find overcrowded families, fine the landlords of overcrowded dwellings, and the occupant too if he refused an offer of suitable alternative accommodation for his family.⁹⁴ The test for overcrowding was simple. All it required was knowledge of who lived in a house, their relationships to one another, how old they were, and where they slept. The ‘personal standard’ found a dwelling-place overcrowded if two or more persons of the opposite sex who were not living as husband and wife shared a room and one of them was ten years or older.⁹⁵ The personal standard was reinforced by the ‘room standard’, which set out how many people could sleep in a room of a given square footage, and thus allowed authorities to map where every member of the household slept.⁹⁶

Overcrowding posed a threat to members of the overcrowded family, to their neighbourhood and town, and to the entire nation, so housing professionals took it seriously. At the national level, one of the driving factors of the call for a ‘separate home for every family’ was that in bombed-out Britain, demobilized ex-servicemen and their wives were sharing homes with their parents or parents-in-law, and while they might not be legally overcrowded, it was a deformation of the Fordist nuclear family supported by a male breadwinner on which social democracy rested.⁹⁷ SHAC urged a separate category of “marriage points” for young couples living with friends or relatives, even if not technically overcrowded, so that they could be allocated council housing *before* they started having children, thus avoiding the “physical and moral dangers” of overcrowding.⁹⁸ They found in 1950 that their overcrowding standard, more stringent than that of the law, had been adopted by most Scottish local authorities.⁹⁹ Prestwich Borough Council, north of Manchester, attempted to capture what they called “moral overcrowding” in their allocation scheme; a ‘morally overcrowded’ family received eight points while a ‘legally overcrowded family’ received ten. For Prestwich, moral overcrowding occurred when “the legally permitted number [of people sleeping in a room] is not exceeded, but where children over 8 years of age and of mixed sexes are compelled to sleep in the same room.”¹⁰⁰ In a special report to the city council from 1960 the Birmingham Housing Manager explained to the city council that their more stringent standard was “one of decency” because it did not pass

⁹³ SHAC, *Choosing Council Tenants*, 18. See chapters 1 and 2. This has led to an enduring suspicion of low-income families living in cramped conditions; see Wrigley, C., “Overcrowding: A Contested Standard,” for the Social Housing Law Association, July 2022 on Roman, R v London Borough of Southwark (24 May 2022).

⁹⁴ Housing Act, 1936, 26 Geo. 5 & 1 Edw. 8, c. 51, s.59.

⁹⁵ Housing Act, 1936 s. 58(1)(a). This standard, and a stricter version of the ‘room standard’, discussed below, standards are still legally binding. See Wendy Wilson and Cathy Barton, “Overcrowded housing (England),” House of Commons Briefing Paper no. 1013, 1 October 2018, 4-5.

⁹⁶ Housing Act, 1936 s. 58(1)(b) and fifth schedule.

⁹⁷ See TNA/HLG 37/29, evidence from the War Office and Housing Management Sub-Committee summary of responses to questionnaire from Metropolitan Borough Councils, Minutes of 6th Meeting, 8 October 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29; London Housing Survey, questionnaire responses St. Marylebone Borough Council, 1964, TNA/HLG 39/98; evidence of Stourbridge Borough Council to the Sub-Committee on the Allocation and Re-Allocation of Tenancies, TNA/HLG 37/84.

⁹⁸ SHAC, *Choosing Council Tenants*, 29.

⁹⁹ SHAC, *Choosing Council Tenants*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Prestwich Borough Points Selection Scheme, Appendix to Paper S.T. 4. TNA/HLG 37/85A. On overcrowding in council housing see TNA/HLG 37/84, evidence collected by the Sub-Committee on the Allocation and Re-Allocation of Tenancies.

sleeping in rooms that were not designed as bedrooms and “made better provision for assessing sex overcrowding.”¹⁰¹ Families who were already in moral danger because they were overcrowded became suspect, and the onus fell on them to demonstrate an absence of “collusion” to gain their overcrowding points.¹⁰²

The law of housing need was an attempt to find, assess, render legible, and quantify the extent to which families deviated from the Fordist nuclear family model. Assessments of need were simple – who slept where? – but they were based on factors that were mutable, like the age of children, and unstable, like relationships between adults. As such, applicants for council housing, and people subject to slum clearance, had to present their families in ways that would show their likeness to the ideal family and submit to being known by the professionals on whom their shelter depended. Local authorities became interpreters of knowledge about the families who came within the ambit of council housing, as housing professionals emphasised that need could only be determined “on merits after investigation of the full circumstances of individual families.”¹⁰³ In their report produced immediately after the end of the war that gave local authorities guidance on how to select the most deserving tenants amidst acute housing scarcity CHAC wrote, “No rigid scheme can embrace the infinite variety of family circumstances which may and do have a bearing upon the urgency of one family’s need...A human problem is involved which needs the human touch.”¹⁰⁴ Councils took this literally. Manchester’s Housing Committee reported to CHAC in 1948 that families whose applications showed them to be in high housing need had their living conditions “investigated” by a Council Visitor who offered “advice and encouragement” to those labelled “substandard.” If, upon their return, the Visitor thought the family had ‘improved’, they received an offer of council accommodation but “sub-standard families who are incapable of improvement are ignored.”¹⁰⁵ The LCC’s Director of Housing offered a less blunt description of the same process when they noted in 1956 that “skilled and sympathetic” housing staff were key to gaining the “full confidence” of people facing compulsory rehousing and persuading them that “the local authority is not being arbitrary but is concerned that the families shall be happily settled in good housing” appropriate for their needs.¹⁰⁶ The law of housing need gave councils the means, the power, the right and the duty to assess family’s housing need but housing need was so slippery and mutable that there *was* no objective way to assess it. Housing problems were “human problems”, intimate problems, and as such, they required “intimate knowledge.”¹⁰⁷

Part II.ii: Balancing Points: From Housing Need to English Social Democrat

¹⁰¹ Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Overcrowding in Birmingham, October 1960. BHM/BCC/1/AG/33/1/1.

¹⁰² Prestwich Borough Points Selection Scheme, Appendix to Paper S.T. 4. TNA/HLG 37/85A. On overcrowding in council housing see TNA/HLG 37/84.

¹⁰³ CHAC, *Management of Housing Estates*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ CHAC, *Management of Housing Estates*, 7; on the ‘human touch’ see also CHAC, *Residential Qualifications*, 23-24 and Housing Management Sub-Committee, Minutes of Meeting item 2(iv) 17 December 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29.

¹⁰⁵ Summary of evidence given orally by Councillor R. S. Harper, Chairman of the Tenancies Sub-Committee and W. H. Bletcher, Chief Tenancies Officer on behalf of Manchester City Council. Appendix to S.T. Minutes 22 October 1948, TNA/HLG 37/84. See also CHAC, *Unsatisfactory Tenants*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Report by L.C.C. Valuer and Director of Housing to CHAC: Housing of Families from Unfit Housing, 17 March 1956. TNA/HLG 37/95; See also *Moving From the Slums*, 2-4.

¹⁰⁷ London Housing Survey Committee (Milner Holland Committee), *Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London*, 1965, Cmnd. 2605, 9-10. See also CHAC, *Unsatisfactory Tenants*, 4, 6.

Housing need was the way to find families who deviated from the Fordist nuclear family model. Balancing points, and other criteria local authorities used to allocate housing that were not strictly related to housing need, were an attempt to render legible the intangible connection of an applicant and his family to their local area, the city, the country, and the empire. As the name suggests, ‘balancing points’ were meant to balance out extreme need to ensure that housing went to applicants who either were, or could be, properly integrated into their communities. According to CHAC’s model, balancing points could be awarded for any combination of war service, length of residence within council bounds, residence in a particular ward, neighbourhood, or district, place of employment, nature of employment, date of application, and suitability of applicant as a council tenant.¹⁰⁸ All of these categories rewarded applicants who could prove a sustained connection with an area, that they were of use to the nation’s economy, or that they had ‘done their bit’ during the war and punished those who could not. No council used every category in their balancing points, and not every council used points schemes, but almost all of them adopted a priority scheme resting on some combination of these criteria so that no family was offered a home purely on housing need.¹⁰⁹

There was one category of ‘balancing’ points more important than any other. As overcrowding was the most efficient way of reading a family to assess how far they deviated from the nuclear family model, so were residential qualifications the most effective way of determining an applicant’s place in the English nation. To politicians, planners, and policy-makers at the national level, the ‘English tradition’ signified a white English identity that was, for the first time, capacious enough to include the entire working class of England, and Wales, with its Scottish equivalent. To the local authorities who had to put housing policy into practice, that was *not* the case. The Englishness that was at the heart of the integrative function council housing was supposed to play, and the material restrictions that made it impossible for local authorities to house everyone who applied, turned that broad whiteness into a highly localized Englishness measured and judged by residential qualifications. Postwar council housing’s vision of integration and equality, precisely because it *was* racialized and gendered, immediately ran into the limitations of basing a policy on making its subjects white Englishmen and women.

Local authorities created residential qualifications to exclude those who would not fit their vision of England and Englishness. Wembley Borough Council required applicants to make a declaration of their five years’ residence in the borough with their application, and these declarations could be checked against the electoral register; they only considered aliens if married to British subjects.¹¹⁰ The LCC barred couples where neither person was a British subject from applying until they had fifteen years’ residence in the County of London. They made exceptions only for certain classes, notably Irish citizens with war service or families who had lived in statutorily overcrowded conditions for three years, the one evidently having their alien status ‘balanced’ by their contribution to the war effort; the other, of course, liable to crime, ill-health and dysfunction, all social problems affecting the English nation in their own right.¹¹¹ Uckfield Rural District Council went so far as to say they were reluctant to house the “gypsy

¹⁰⁸ CHAC, *Selection of Tenants*, Appendix III, 28.

¹⁰⁹ London Housing Survey: Milner Holland Committee, “Research Papers: Questionnaire on Housing Stock to 87 Local Authorities in G.L.C. Area. Questions 6-9.” TNA/HLG 39/98.

¹¹⁰ Evidence given to the Housing Management Sub-Committee by Councillor Sullivan, Housing Manager, and Miss Allen, Housing Manager, 7 September 1954. TNA/HLG 37/29.

¹¹¹ Summary of Evidence Given to the Housing Management Sub-Committee 8 October 1954. TNA/HLG 37/29.

type of applicant.”¹¹² So un-English were families who could not meet residential qualifications that they were referred to as ‘stateless’.¹¹³

Residential qualifications were not only to keep out families who did not fit the tradition of Englishness of a particular district; they were also to secure the interests of those who did. Edmonton, in north London, imposed a ten year residential qualification “[t]o ensure that Edmonton houses go to Edmonton people” and the housing manager of Gateshead admitted that his council gave no preference to ex-servicemen because local residents would “object strongly” if they did.¹¹⁴ The Urban District Councils’ Association admitted that seaside towns and health resorts often resorted to residential qualifications “to avoid being over-whelmed by applicants desiring to reside in their areas on retirement or for health reasons.”¹¹⁵ This was based on a conviction that strangers, alien to the community and without local credit of any kind, would crowd out applicants who *did* deserve, as Stourbridge Borough Council had it, “the ability to make good in a council house.”¹¹⁶ Manchester set their two-year residential qualification so that “old residents with housing need were not prejudiced by newcomers – many of them from Eire – living in overcrowded conditions.”¹¹⁷ Some local authorities argued to CHAC that their imposition of a residential qualification was aimed at avoiding overcrowding by “preventing an influx of strangers” while Birmingham’s town clerk justified his city’s five-year residential qualification on the “experience” the city had of families moving into the city, living in poor conditions, and prejudicing the applications of indigenous Birmingham residents: “Many of these comprise large units and living in crowded units they become highly pointed on registration [for council housing]. The five years residential or employment qualification was introduced in fairness to other highly pointed cases who are natives of the city.”¹¹⁸ Although civil servants and national politicians lamented the fact that the largest single group adversely affected by residential qualifications were demobilized servicemen returning from the war and, later, national service which was required of all men aged 17-21 between 1949 and 1960. Public health professionals, too, pointed out that tuberculosis especially was a huge burden for many families

¹¹² Summary of evidence given orally by Mr. J. R. Coulthard, Chairman of the Health and Housing Committee, and Miss E. M. Maddox, B. Sc., Housing Manager on behalf of the Rural District Council of Uckfield, 1 October 1948. TNA/HLG 37/84.

¹¹³ CHAC Housing Management Sub-Committee, Minutes of Meeting 3 June 1954, item 3, TNA/HLG 37/29; Correspondence between Minister of Housing and the Housing Management Sub-Committee 1950-54, TNA/HLG 37/30; 37/38; CHAC, *Residential Qualifications*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Analysis of Information Supplied by Local Authorities up to 18 August 1954, Housing Management Sub-Committee on Residential Qualifications, August 1954. TNA/HLG 37/30; Mr Smith, Housing Manager of Gateshead, evidence given to the Housing Management Sub-Committee, 7 September 1954, TNA 37/29. See also Lambeth witnesses quoted in Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration: Housing. Vol. 1. Session 1970-71 H.C. no.508-I, 46.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum by the Urban District Councils’ Association submitted to the Housing Management Sub-Committee on Residential Qualifications, August 1954. TNA/HLG 37/30.

¹¹⁶ Summary of evidence given orally by Alderman H. S. Walker, Chairman of the Housing Committee, and Mr. F. T. Hillman, Chief Housing Clerk, on behalf of Stourbridge Borough Council to the Housing Management Sub-Committee, CHAC, 1 October 1948. TNA/HLG 37/84.

¹¹⁷ Evidence given to Housing Management Sub-Committee by Alderman Quincey, Chairman of the Tenancies Sub-Committee and Mr Baumber, Chief Tenancies Officer, Manchester City Council, 7 September 1954. TNA/HLG 37/29.

¹¹⁸ Housing Management Sub-Committee, R.Q.E. 6th meeting minutes, 8 October 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29; J. F. Gregg to P. J. Harrop, 19 July 1954, TNA/HLG 37/31.

that kept them poor, transient, and overcrowded, all of which hastened the progression and spread of the disease, residential qualifications are still the norm.¹¹⁹

Conclusion: The Slum Crisis Redux, 1964

Labour fell short of its promised target of 240,000 new houses per year and its failure to meet its housing targets were an important part of its fall from power in 1951.¹²⁰ Far from general needs, the Conservatives who succeeded Labour wanted local authorities to “fade out” of housing provision, as the Minister of Housing, and future prime minister, Harold Macmillan said in committee in 1952.¹²¹ Instead, local authorities were to concentrate on slum clearance and redevelopment, while private builders returned to building homes for everyone outside the slums. Subsidies for ‘general needs’ housing were correspondingly reduced in 1954 while private builders were granted more licences to build.¹²² Billed as restoring the free market to residential property, the shift away from general needs in council housing and Macmillan’s emphasis on private building for the majority and local authority provision for the special cases – slums – was completed by a string of acts passed between 1956 and 1957.¹²³ First the Housing (Subsidies) Act of 1956 abolished exchequer contributions for new houses erected for general needs; next, in 1957 the new Housing Act consolidated all the preceding acts and renewed the emphasis on slum clearance and redevelopment and finally, also in 1957, the Rent Act declared a three-year period in which all rent controls still in force would be phased out.

It became clear as those three years drew to a close that the end of rent control – known as decontrol – was going to send shockwaves through the residential property market. The committee appointed by the Housing Minister, Keith Joseph, whose government had enacted the phase-out concluded that the London rental market was deeply dysfunctional and that decontrol was causing, and would continue to cause widespread hardship.¹²⁴ Rent control had existed in some form or another since 1915 and most of the properties still subject to rent control by the time the Rent Act, 1957 went into effect, were far below market value and inhabited by tenants too poor to afford market rates in their districts. The anticipated stress to the private market, and to the public sector which would have to step in to house any decontrolled tenants evicted and made homeless, not to mention distress to the renters whose rents, the very cheapest in the country, were about to be decontrolled, was so great that the Conservatives passed another Rent Act. The phase-out of rent control was continued but the deadline for full decontrol was extended another three years. But, in 1963, the same thing happened. The spectre of mass decontrol of the

¹¹⁹ Memorandum by the Director of Army Education, War Office, submitted to the Housing Management Sub-Committee on Residential Qualifications, August 1954, TNA/HLG 37/30; Housing Management Sub-Committee, Minutes of Meeting 3 June 1954, items 4 and 5, TNA/HLG 37/29; Letter received by Housing Management Sub-Committee from the Association of Municipal Corporations appended to Minutes of Meeting 3 June 1954, TNA/HLG 37/29; Housing Management Sub-Committee Minutes of Meeting 8 October 1954, item 4, TNA/HLG 37/29; Cmd. 9876, 18-19. Dr Trenchard, tuberculosis specialist, Edgware General Hospital, August 1954, TNA/HLG 37/30; County Council of Middlesex, correspondence with the Housing Management Sub-Committee, 5 October 1954, TNA/HLG 37/31; Dr Herbert Davies Chalke, “Housing Problems of the Tuberculous,” April 1953, WELL/GC/200/E/1/29 and “Housing and the Tuberculous Family,” address given to the Society of Medical Officers of Health and the National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis, 1 February 1952, WELL/GC/200/E/1/25.

¹²⁰ Jones, “‘This is Magnificent!’” 99-121.

¹²¹ Quoted in Weiler, “Rise and Fall,” 125.

¹²² Weiler, “Rise and Fall,” 125-8.

¹²³ Cmd. 2605, 10-11; Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatization of Council Housing* (London: Routledge, 1988), 26.

¹²⁴ Cmd. 2605, introduction.

rents of the poorest people in the country loomed and a rash of inflammatory articles exposed scandalously bad conditions at the bottom of the rental market. The end of decontrol became a second ‘slum crisis’, just like that of the 1880s, and, just like the 1880s, the government responded by authorising what became a two-year inquiry into London’s rented accommodation, both public and private.¹²⁵

Aside from the dysfunction of the London rental market, both public and private, the other main finding of the Milner Holland Inquiry and Report was that there was a substantial urban underclass comprised of *both* slum dwellers *and* their landlords. Reprising many of the themes of the 1880s slum crisis, slumlords were castigated for exploiting the poorest people in the country by letting their properties fall into ruins and harassing their rent-controlled tenants until they left so that they could let their properties at market rates. As in the 1880s, both slum dwellers and their landlords were depicted as exotic, racialized outsiders whose mores were unsavoury, foreign, and likely to corrupt the nation in which they lived. The press was full of stories of families living in ‘Dickensian’ conditions and the landlord singled out as the avatar of the rapacious slumlord, so much so that his name appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a byword for those practices, was Perec Rachman, a Jewish Holocaust survivor.¹²⁶ Immigrants from the so-called ‘new Commonwealth’, the Caribbean, India, and Pakistan were held to overcrowd themselves as much from ignorance and personal preference as want of money, and they were criticised for pushing up demand for the cheapest rental property, for becoming slumlords in their turn, and for all the social ills slum dwellers were considered to be liable.¹²⁷

However, as well as the hysteria, there was considerable sympathy for slum dwellers, even if they *were* criticised for having large families – especially if they were immigrants from Ireland or the West Indies – and none at all for landlords, but it was evident that the entire decontrol scandal, and all the people caught up in it, were very far from the vision of English social democracy around which housing policy had been built. Councillor Brown of Camberwell said, “The whole of the people in the private sector are living in absolute fear” of being decontrolled and evicted; there was no way the council housing stock could keep up; it was a “disgrace...to see the fear and the anxiety neurosis under which these people are living and the desperation for them to get under the Council’s umbrella.”¹²⁸ Brown admitted to the MPs and peers of the realm running the inquiry that his council’s efforts to ameliorate housing problems were almost entirely “bluff” because they had neither the land to house enough people, nor the money to embark on large-scale redevelopment of slum areas, nor the power to compel landlords to make their properties legally fit for human habitation.¹²⁹ Ultimately, he said that his Council had “failed horribly” at its task of providing housing for the people.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Forrest and Murie, *Selling the Welfare State*, 26-28.

¹²⁶ See e.g. Julia Bastian, “An Old Square Gets With It,” *Ideal Home* (June 1964), 21-28; “Bad Homes Block Fight for Better Public Health,” *Islington Gazette* 25 February 1964, 25; “When is a slum not a slum?” *New Society* 9 July 1964, 18-19; “And They Call it Home,” *Daily Herald* 23 June 1964, 3; “Minister Finds Squalor Near Westminster.” *Times*, July 12, 1961, 14. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed August 7, 2023).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS235102444/TTDA?u=ucberkeley&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=77b0b13e>.

¹²⁷ See e.g. Elspeth Huxley, “Blacks Next Door” and “Cocoanuts in Ladbroke Grove,” *Punch* 29 January 1964 and 5 February 1964; R. J. Allerton to L. R. Mustill, 2 September 1964, correspondence re. interim report to Minister, TNA 39/63; London Housing Survey: Metropolitan Borough of Paddington Statement, 27 January 1964, TNA/HLG 39/69; Report by J. H. Weir, Medical Officer of Health, Royal Borough of Kensington, 1960, TNA/HLG 39/82.

¹²⁸ Councillor Brown, evidence to Committee, 1964, 5-6, TNA/HLG 39/68.

¹²⁹ Councillor Brown, evidence to Committee, 1964, 6, 14, TNA/HLG 39/68; Willesden Borough Council evidence to Committee, 4, TNA/HLG 39/68.

¹³⁰ Councillor Brown, evidence to Committee, 1964, 6-8, TNA/HLG 39/68

The vision of the English social democrat did not cause the crisis at the end of decontrol. But it did not help it. Owner occupation rose through the 1950s, so that in 1965 nearly half of the homes in Britain were owner-occupied; and millions of council houses were built, so that by 1965, for the first time ever, renting privately was no longer the most common form of housing tenure. But though the private sector shrank, it shrank most slowly at the bottom, among tenants living in slums that had not been cleared. These were precisely the kind of tenants who were in need and yet whose poverty made it difficult for them to satisfy councils' eligibility requirements. 'Need' was the central tension between expansion and exclusion contained in the vision of English social democrats. The intensive personal knowledge of each individual family that every district council attempted to acquire about the people on their waiting list was what enabled housing committees to decide not only who got housing, *why* they were offered housing, what kind of housing they would be offered, and where within council estates they would be placed. This tension ran all the way through council allocation schemes and meant that the knowledge production schema that governed the application process followed tenants to their new homes on council estates.

Council estates were to integrate their residents into national life on terms of equality never previously promised to council tenants. The removal of the restrictive 'working classes' from the law of council housing and the call for a separate home for each family, no matter what class they came from, was a radically expanded vision of the possibilities and promises of council housing. For the first time, housing policy embraced the entire population of Great Britain and was supposed to offer a challenge to the private housing sector at both ends, by building estates that were as good as, if not better, than private developments, for affordable prices, and by eliminating slums. The vision of the English social democrat reoriented housing policy. But, because it offered integration only on classed, raced, and gendered terms, it excluded many Britons. It is to those Britons, their struggle to gain access to council housing, and what that did to the vision of the English social democrat and the law behind it that I will now turn.

Chapter Four

The End of the English Social Democrat: Slum Clearance, Modern Poverty, and Council Housing After Empire 1964-75

Introduction

In September 1966 the mayor of Tower Hamlets Borough Council received a letter from residents of one of the poorest districts, Whitechapel, in his working-class east London jurisdiction. They wrote:

We the people of Blackwall Buildings, through the Blackwall Tenants Association, are sending you a list of complaints, and living conditions, that we are expected to live under...habitation is almost impossible under the conditions that we state[.]

The Blackwall residents listed dampness, rot, dry rot, beetle and silverfish infestations, broken windows, cracked ceilings, bad wiring, warped doors, unusable chimneys and fireplaces, broken drains and cracked pipes, broken lights, doors and locks, stolen washing, “drunks or tramps” sleeping in the outhouses, piles of uncollected rubbish, flies, rats, and broken glass. They concluded:

The state is crying out about Juvenile Delinquency, what else can you expect when children have to be brought up in conditions such as these[;] the only thing that would be of any use to Blackwall Buildings would be to have them DEMOLISHED.¹

Blackwall Tenants Association’s call for demolition came as the number of homes cleared in slum clearance ‘drives’ across Britain were reaching their greatest heights. In England and Wales new demolition and closure records were set in 1966, 1967 and 1968. 66,782 houses were closed or demolished in 1966, 71,152 in 1967 and the highest ever annual total, 71,586 houses in 1968.² Scotland looked similar, with 16,650 in 1966, 19,087, the highest ever, in 1967 and 18,768 in 1968.³ In the twenty years between the end of the war and the Blackwall tenants’ letter the state of the dwellings – the slums – that they wrote about, and of the people who lived in them had changed both very much and not at all.

The thing that remained unchanged was, of course, the conditions of the slums themselves. The Blackwall Buildings tenants and others like them were living in conditions that had been recognised as abysmal for two centuries. But, at the same time, by 1966 the dire condition of Blackwall Buildings was far less common than it had been in 1766, 1866, or even 1936. Throughout the 1950s full employment, economic growth, and rising affluence had made Britons, in general, better housed than ever before. Though exact, Britain-wide data is hard to

¹ Letter from the Blackwall Tenants Association to the Mayor of Tower Hamlets Borough Council, September 1966, Tower Hamlets Local History and Library Archives (hereafter THM) L/THL/B/1/2/11.

² Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Welsh Office, *Handbook of Statistics 1967* (London: HMSO, 1968), table 13, p. 11; Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Welsh Office, *Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales* no. 9 (London: HMSO, 1969), Table 3, p. 2; J. A. Yelling, “The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales 1955-85,” *Urban History* 27, no. 2 (2000): 236.

³ Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Scottish Development Department, Welsh Office, *Housing Statistics: Great Britain* no. 9 (London: HMSO, 1969), Table 36, p. 45; *Housing Statistics: Great Britain* no. 18 (London: HMSO, 1970), Table 37, p. 46.

come by, the number of householders reporting that that their homes were comfortable and well-appointed rose dramatically while statutory overcrowding, after rising in the immediate postwar years, had, by 1966, fallen to its lowest levels ever.⁴ Living rooms and separate bedrooms for the children grew more common and, as owner-occupation and council tenancies both increased to 43% and 23%, in 1961, respectively, and 51% and 29% in 1971, a wholly unprecedented number of households began to enjoy stable, secure accommodation.⁵ As late as 1939 this kind of security had been barely dreamt of, as ‘moonlight flits’ to escape the rent collector remained a key survival strategy for working-class families.⁶ The rise of suburban living, whether private developments, New Towns, or council estates across Britain is testament, as scholars have further noted, to the growing numbers of families who could afford those homes and their attendant trappings, cars, televisions, and so on. These changes were reflected, inter alia, in increasing purchases of consumer durables, like televisions, refrigerators, washing machines and record players, which all signalled not only that the homes themselves had the space and the capacity for appliances like these, but that the families could afford them, and that the household was intending to stay in one place for a long time.⁷

Rising affluence at large made the persistence of the severe poverty of the slums an even greater embarrassment to Britain’s leaders. Demolition and redevelopment of poor neighbourhoods was part of a bipartisan project to present a revitalized and renewed Britain to the world, and the Blackwall residents’ call for demolition marked the growing importance of slum clearance in this endeavour.⁸ From the mid-1950s on the Conservative party argued that the proper function of the state in housing provision was slum clearance, urban renewal, and rehousing those displaced by clearance projects. Slum clearance and related development projects were appropriate interventions for local authorities to make into economic and social life because slums and ‘decayed’ areas were places where neither the market nor society were functioning well. Over the 1950s, and especially under the influence of Harold Macmillan, who

⁴ Rising housing standards (more amenities, more space, better heating) were reported by CHAC’s Sub-Committee on Housing Standards in *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (London: HMSO, 1961) otherwise known as the Parker Morris Committee and the Parker Morris Report. They are also summarised in John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1986), 282-84 and 306-07. On occupancy rates and overcrowding see A. M. Carr-Saunders, D. Caradog-Jones and C. A. Moser, *A Survey of Social Conditions in England and Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 38-39 and Department of Health for Scotland *Report for 1960: Part II: Housing, Planning and Environment*, 1961, Cmnd. 1361, 8; Cmd. 2605, 98. On the significance of the Parker Morris Report see Alistair Kefford, “Housing the Citizen-Consumer in Post-war Britain: The Parker Morris Report, Affluence and the Even Briefer Life of Social Democracy,” *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 2 (2018): 225-58; Savia Palate, “*Homes for Today and Tomorrow*: Britain’s Parker Morris Standards and the West Ham Experimental Scheme,” *Architecture and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2022): 457-82.

⁵ English Housing Survey data on tenure trends and cross tenure: Table FT1101 (S101): Trends in Tenure 2023, accessed 29 April 2024 <

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64af3084c033c1000d806207/FT1101_Trends_in_tenure_58.ods >

⁶ See e.g. Kathleen Dayus, *Her People* (London: Virago, 1982); David Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Longman, 1991), 15; Michael Anderson, “The Social Implications of Demographic Change,” in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain* Vol. II *People and Their Environment* ed. F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13.

⁷ Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 282-84; Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid-Twentieth Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2012), ch. 6. On postwar affluence and the diffusion of consumer durables see e.g. Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 36.

⁸ On the importance both major parties attached to bold new planning ventures to burnish Britain’s image see Guy Ortolano, “Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain.” *Historical Journal* 52, no. 2 (2011): 500-01.

served as Housing Minister (1951-54), Chancellor of the Exchequer (1955-57), and Prime Minister (1957-63), the Conservatives reoriented public housing law and policy away from ‘general needs’ and towards slum clearance. In contrast to the Attlee government’s vision of council housing as a viable competitor to the private sector, the Conservative party claimed that the market should meet, could meet, and, if deregulated appropriately, would meet the general housing needs of the population.⁹ Local authorities were pushed pursue slum clearance, redevelopment and rehousing at the expense of independent ‘general needs’ developments, while planning restrictions were lightened and new subsidies for homebuyers were created to increase owner-occupation.¹⁰ Subsidies for ‘general needs’ council housing were reduced in 1954 and then abolished in 1956, while those for clearance and rehousing were retained.¹¹ Although mounting stress at the lowest end of the private housing sector prodded Macmillan’s government to re-subsidise general needs council housing in the Housing Act, 1961, that act made it clear that local authorities were to remain focused on slum clearance and rehousing through a tiered system of subsidies.¹²

The pressure on local authorities to eliminate slums and house their people brought unprecedented strain to council housing as a whole, and so the final aim of this chapter is to reinsert the politics of the slum and slum clearance back into the story of council housing after the Second World War. The politics of sexual and racial anarchy that Britain’s political class had associated with slum dwellers since the nineteenth century came to the council estate, even as the estate was, as we have seen in the previous chapters, deliberately designed to be the site of everything the slum was not. At the same time, decolonization and deindustrialization were forcing a renegotiation of the meaning of what the culture of Britain was, what rights and benefits British citizenship conveyed, and to whom. The tensions these concurrent developments generated in slums and on council estates struck at the heart of the imperial politics that had made council housing. Like the empire, the council housing project crumbled in the 1960s and 1970s around battles over citizenship, rights, equality, fairness, and ways of living.

Part I: Poverty And Affluence

The Blackwall tenants’ protest is of a piece with a wider reckoning occurring at the same time over what was called then, and is still known as now, the ‘rediscovery of poverty.’ This rediscovery took many forms but was led by professional social scientists, whose studies revealed the persistence of crippling poverty in Britain despite the welfare state and the managed economy. In the study that launched the ‘rediscovery’, *The Poor and the Poorest*, sociologist Peter Townsend and economist Brian Abel-Smith calculated that the poverty rate in Britain, which they defined as a household income of less than 140% of National Assistance benefits, the

⁹ Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Minister for Welsh Affairs, *Housing in England and Wales*, 1961, Cmnd. 1290; J. B. Cullingworth, “Housing and the Private Landlord,” *The Guardian* March 24, 1961, p. 14. Peter Weiler, “The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives’ ‘Grand Design for Housing’, 1951-64,” *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 128-37. On the complex and sometimes contradictory policies shaping the private residential sector see Peter M. Scott and James T. Walker, “‘Stop-go’ policy and the restriction of postwar British house-building,” *Economic History Review* 72, no. 2 (2019): 8-9. On Macmillan, housing and the Treasury see G. C. Peden, *The Treasury and British Public Policy, 1906-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 500-04.

¹⁰ Cmnd. 1290, introduction.

¹¹ Housing Repairs and Rents Act, 1954 Housing (Subsidies) Act, 1956; Housing Act, 1957.

¹² Housing Act, 1961; Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 286-7; Brian Lund, *Housing Politics in the United Kingdom: Power, Planning and Protest* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2016) 74-75, 161-62.

minimum government-provided subsistence payments.¹³ Using that definition, they concluded that 17.9% of households, or 14.2% of the population of the United Kingdom, were enduring “low levels of living” with household incomes of less than 140% of National Assistance, in 1960.¹⁴ Within this, nearly five percent of households reported incomes at or below the ‘official’ minimum income for their household formation, National Assistance.¹⁵ Clearly, they argued, poverty was not a thing of the past.

Yet this poverty was different too; it had changed shape from a mass to a specific phenomenon. Rising wages and steady employment from below and wealth taxes from above had reduced overall economic inequality in Britain to its lowest levels ever; no longer was every working-class family, no matter how skilled the breadwinner, one or two accidents away from penury.¹⁶ Instead, social scientists found that poverty was becoming concentrated among certain groups of people, in certain places.¹⁷ By 1966, the year of the Blackwall tenants’ protest, consensus was emerging among professional social scientists over who was likely to be poor, what their household formations looked like, and their distribution among the various demographic groups in British society. The household formation least likely to be in poverty was a white stably-employed man with a wife and two children; that is, just the kind of family, the English social democrat, for whom the postwar welfare state in general, and council housing in particular, had been made.¹⁸ Quantitative and qualitative studies alike found that the obverse was true as well: though they did not put it like this, investigators showed consistently that the concentration of poverty was increasing among households who were not the four-person nuclear family even as it decreased among those who were.¹⁹

The social investigators working in the ‘rediscovery of poverty’ showed that in the post-war period, as general deprivation receded, the likelihood of experiencing poverty grew more dependent on family form. In a marked change from the interwar period poverty rates among adults of working age dropped or stayed steady in the postwar period, with three major

¹³ Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest* (London: Bell, 1965), 18, and ch. 2.

¹⁴ Abel-Smith and Townsend, *Poor and the Poorest*, 57.

¹⁵ Abel-Smith and Townsend, *Poor and the Poorest*, 17, 58.

¹⁶ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, chs. 3-4; Anthony Heath and Clive Payne, “Social Mobility,” in *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* ed. A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 256-63. Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton’s introduction to their edited volume *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War Golden Age Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) is a useful summary of ‘the age of affluence’, including its conventional periodization from 1951, the end of postwar austerity (except rationing, which was not fully abolished until 1954), to the oil crisis and depression in 1973.

¹⁷ There was disagreement over how to define and measure poverty. Peter Townsend was an important early utilizer of the concept of ‘relative deprivation,’ later criticized and refined by Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen. ‘Relative poverty’ remains an important concept in the social sciences and social policy. See Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Amartya Sen, “Poor, Relatively Speaking,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 35, no. 2 (1983): 153-69; Therese Saltkjel and Ira Malmberg-Heimonen, “Absolute or Relative? Definitions and the Different Understandings of Poverty,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Poverty* ed. Bent Greve (London: Routledge, 2020), 24-32.

¹⁸ See ch. 3.

¹⁹ See e.g. B. Seebohm Rowntree and G. R. Lavers, *Poverty and the Welfare State* (London: Longman, 1951), 34-35; Carr-Saunders et al., *Social Conditions in England and Wales*, 38-45, 166-68, 202-03; Dorothy Cole Wedderburn, “Poverty in Britain Today – The Evidence,” *Sociological Review* (November 1962): 257-82; Abel-Smith and Townsend, *Poor and the Poorest*, 41; D. V. Donnison, *The Government of Housing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 214-15; Ministry of Housing and Local Government Research and Development Group, *Living in a Slum: A Study of St Mary’s, Oldham* (London: HMSO, 1970), 10; W. V. Hole and M. T. Pountney, *Trends in Population, Housing and Occupancy Rates 1861-1961* (London: HMSO, 1971), 8-9.

exceptions: the elderly, single women, and 'large families' with four or more children.²⁰ Households headed by unskilled workers, single women, with or without children or other dependents, were much more likely to be in poverty than single men; among the elderly, single women living alone were more numerous than single men, and also poorer. Similarly, lone-parent households, the vast majority of which were headed by women, were much more likely to be in poverty than two-parents families.²¹ Even *The Poor and the Poorest*, written to rebut what Abel-Smith and Townsend argued were the "two assumptions that have governed much economic thinking in Britain since the war," that poverty had been "abolished" and that "we are a much more equal society," implicitly confirmed that full employment, rising wages, and the welfare state had removed the threat of absolute destitution from stable four-person nuclear families.²² Abel-Smith and Townsend took exception to the third study by Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and the Welfare State* (1951), for painting too rosy a picture of post-war social services reducing poverty, but they too found that poverty was highest among households that were not a four-person nuclear family:

Over half the one-person households and over a quarter of the households with six or more persons had low incomes. Among households with eight or more members nearly *two in five*...had low incomes. The lowest proportion of households with low incomes was found among those with four persons.²³

As the experience of poverty grew more gendered, in that it was more likely to affect single women, single mothers and their children, and more relative, which is to say more classed, in that ceased to be a fact of all working-class life, and instead became a more concentrated threat to those in the lowest socio-economic groupings, it also grew more obviously racialized. By 1966, the population of Britons of colour, otherwise known as 'New Commonwealth' immigrants and their families was estimated to be approximately one million people, overwhelmingly concentrated in the 'six conurbations' of England: Tyneside, West Yorkshire, South East Lancashire, Merseyside, the West Midlands, and Greater London.²⁴ Although urban sociologist Ruth Glass refuted arguments that West Indian migrants were so concentrated in certain parts of London that they had become American-style 'ghettoes,' she did show that there were several "fairly dense" clusters of West Indian migrants in Notting Hill and Brixton.²⁵ Other sociologists found the same in different cities for different ethnic groups, including the so-called

²⁰ Findings summarised by Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 140-41. See also Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 217; MHLG, *Living in a Slum*, 16-17.

²¹ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*; Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 220-21; Department of Health and Social Security, *Report of the Committee on One-Parent Families*, 1974, Cmnd. 5629, Parts Three and Five; MHLG, *Living in a Slum*, 17-19.

²² Abel-Smith and Townsend, *Poor and the Poorest*, 9.

²³ Abel-Smith and Townsend, *Poor and the Poorest*, 41. Emphasis original.

²⁴ General Register Office, *Census 1961: England and Wales: Commonwealth Immigrants in the Conurbations* (London: HMSO, 1965), xvi-xvii; G. B. Gillian Lomas and Elizabeth Monck, *The Coloured Population of Great Britain: A Comparative Study of Coloured Households in Four County Boroughs based on the 1971 Census of Population* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1975); G. C. K. Peach, "Immigrants in the Inner City," *Geographical Journal* 141, no. 3 (1975): 374.

²⁵ Ruth Glass, *London's Newcomers: The West Indian Migrants* (1960. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 41.

'Ugandan Asians' in Leicester.²⁶ Despite a higher total employment rate than the native-born population (55% as to 48%) Britons of colour were more likely to hold unskilled, low-paid jobs, and to live in poor-quality housing in what Glass described as "patches of inner London which have been neglected."²⁷ Sociologists further found that Britons of colour consistently scored higher on indices of need used to assess applicants for social services than the general population and that the housing problem was "harsher and more stubborn" for them than any other problem they faced.²⁸

Britons of colour were also more likely not to live in the heterosexual family unit favoured by the welfare state. Rather, the households of Britons of colour could take a variety of forms, including single parents and children, multi-generational families, and 'horizontally extended' groupings of brothers, uncles and cousins. Researchers with the Institute of Political and Economic Planning (PEP) found that families of colour had both more children than white families, on average, and, in the case of migrants from south Asia, more adults as well.²⁹ Despite the Commonwealth Immigration Acts of 1962 and 1971 which abolished the unrestricted right of entry to Britain enjoyed by all Commonwealth citizens since 1948, tightened family reunification requirements, and instituted a system of work visas, PEP data showed that seven percent of Asian households were multigenerational, consisting of children, working-age adults and retirement-age adults living together compared with three percent of the white population and two percent of the West Indian population.³⁰ There were other differences too; families of Caribbean migrants were more likely to be single-parent households than white or Asian families, and academic and casual observers were fascinated with what social researcher David Smith called the "horizontally extended" Asian family.³¹ Smith defined a horizontally extended family as one "in which not all household members are vertically related to the head or related to him or her as husband and wife." This somewhat convoluted phrasing simply means members of the household who are not members either of the primary nuclear family or the householder's parents or parents-in-law. Smith found that seventeen percent of all Asian families were 'horizontally extended,' and of that seventeen percent four percent were households of two or more adult men (though this proportion rose to twelve percent among migrants from Pakistan).³²

Poverty became more spatially concentrated in certain parts of British cities over the two decades following the end of the Second World War as well.³³ As early as 1947, the Minister for

²⁶ Peach, "Immigrants in the Inner City," 375-77; Lomas and Monck, *Coloured Population*, section four; Valerie Marett, *Immigrants Settling in the City* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), chs. 4 and 7.

²⁷ Glass, *London's Newcomers*, 47-48; Lomas and Monck, *Coloured Population*, 34 esp. Table III.2; Working Party of Housing Directors, *Housing in Multi-Racial Areas* (London: Community Relations Commission, 1976), 9-10, BL/OP-GPB/10017.

²⁸ Glass, *London's Newcomers*, 29, 44; Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 336; W. W. Daniel, *Racial Discrimination in England: Based on the PEP Report* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 151; *Housing in Multi-Racial Areas*, BL/OP-GPB/100171; David J. Smith, *Racial Disadvantage in Britain: The PEP Report* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 9, 263-64.

²⁹ Smith, *Racial Disadvantage*, 44-45.

³⁰ Smith, *Racial Disadvantage*, 47; Lomas and Monck, *Coloured Population*, 24-25; *Housing in Multi-Racial Areas*, 23-24, BL/OP-GPB/10017.

³¹ Smith, *Racial Disadvantage*, 49-52; *Housing in Multi-Racial Areas*, 19-21, BL/OP-GPB/10017; Elizabeth Burney, *Housing on Trial: A Study of Immigrants and Local Government* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 35-36.

³² Smith, *Racial Disadvantage*, 47-49.

³³ Department of the Environment, *Change or Decay: Final Report of the Liverpool Inner Area Study* (London: HMSO, 1977); *Inner London: Policies for Dispersal and Balance: Final Report of the Lambeth Inner Area Study* (London: HMSO, 1977); *Unequal City: Final Report of the Birmingham Inner Area Study* (London: HMSO, 1977);

Town and Country Planning pointed out that “blitzed areas” and “areas of blight” often coalesced.³⁴ Returns sent by local authorities to the Ministry of Housing on the quality of housing in their districts and progress they had made on slum clearance in 1954 showed that every city and town was still suffering the effects of the extreme housing shortage that had prevailed at the end of the war; every urban authority had at least some unfit housing and overcrowding to deal with.³⁵ But the housing stock grew over the subsequent decade, the more affluent and stable working classes took advantage of it, and moved to the suburbs, council and not.³⁶ Those who could not take advantage of Britain’s spreading suburbs remained in older, inner-city working-class districts with poor-quality, obsolete housing.³⁷ Residents of these districts were disproportionately likely to be those experiencing the modern poverty chronicled by the sociologists: very low incomes, disability, low-paid, precarious work, and were more likely, again, to be living in households that did not match the white heterosexual nuclear family. As private and public housing stock increased over the 1950s, housing need that had once been widespread diminished, except among those in deepest poverty. The families of the slums endured statutory unfitness for human habitation, statutory overcrowding, lack of amenities, and abusive landlords.³⁸ Local authorities in inner London reported that constituents facing the end of rent control were “desperate...to get under the Council’s umbrella,” for the security of tenure and greatly improved amenities council housing offered but they were all too often unable to accept the only council housing available, homes on suburban ‘out-county’ LCC estates in Essex and Kent due to poverty, illness, disability, old age, or some combination of the above.³⁹

At the national level, the location of slums and twilight areas highlighted longer-term trends in the shifting geography of British industry. In 1965 alone local authorities in the three planning regions of Yorkshire and Humberside (Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Grimsby, Hull), the

London Borough of Lambeth, *Into the Seventies: Lambeth Housing: A Review of Demand, Supply and Costs* (London: London Borough of Lambeth, 1969), LMA/GLC/AR/HOD/10/010.

³⁴ 432 H. C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1947) col. 959. Catherine Emma Jones et. al., “Bomb Sight: Mapping the WW2 Bomb Census, version 1.0, accessed November 7, 2023 < <http://bombsight.org/#15/51.5050/-0.0900>>; See e.g. Bootle destruction: “The Liverpool Blitz,” Imperial War Museum, accessed November 7, 2023, <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-liverpool-blitz>> alongside CHAC’s visit to Bootle to visit slum clearance progress in 1937 (TNA/HLG 37/7); and discussion in Plymouth over combining slum clearance with redeveloping blitzed central areas: Plymouth City Council, Lord Mayor’s File, “Notes for Meeting,” 25 October 1943, PLY/1495/14.

³⁵ R. A. Parker, *House Breaking* (London: Newman Neame, 1963), 2-3, BL/8299.r.24; Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 285-86.

³⁶ Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me? The Search for Community in Post-War England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 72; Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Postwar England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 47.

³⁷ Parker, *House Breaking*, 7, BL/8299.r.24; CHAC, *Moving From the Slums* (London: HMSO, 1956), 2-3; Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, 152-53. On the discursive formation of the ‘inner city’ see Rob Waters, “Respectability and Race Between the Suburb and the City: An Argument about the Making of ‘Inner-City’ London,” *Urban History* 50, no. 2 (2023): 215; Otto Saumarez Smith, “The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 27, no. 4 (2016): 578-98; and Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), chs. 2 and 3.

³⁸ This is chronicled most exhaustively in Cmd. 2605 and the evidence collected by the Committee, TNA/HLG 39 series. See also Leicester Shelter Group Research Committee, “Housing Conditions in Leicester,” August 1973, tables 1-8, Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Records Office (hereafter LEI)/DE6314/Box 5; MHLG, *Living in a Slum*, 3, 17; “East End Housing Hustle,” *Race Today* 7, no. 8 (1975): 176-77; Town Planning Division, Ealing Borough Council, “Ealing Borough Plan: Position Statement 5: Housing: for consultation May ’78,” figs. 6 and 7, pp. 28-29, Institute of Race Relations (hereafter IRR)/01/04/04/01/12/005.

³⁹ Councillor Brown, evidence to Committee, 1964, 5-6, TNA/HLG 39/68.

North West (Liverpool, Greater Manchester), and the West Midlands (Birmingham, Coventry, Stafford) *each* closed or demolished more houses as unfit than did all the local authorities of the South East region put together. This despite the fact that the population of the South East, which stretched from Bournemouth in the south west to Bedford in the north east and included London, was more than seventeen million and the combined population of Yorkshire, the North West, and the West Midlands was sixteen and a half.⁴⁰ The industrial economy of the north, north west, and Scotland was beginning to contract while the service economy based in the south east, and above all in London, grew and grew. Economic heft continued to shift from the north and the north west to the south east, from heavy industry and manufacturing to services, and the working-class neighbourhoods built around a town's factory, mill, colliery, or dock continued to decay as well.⁴¹ In Greater London, the only place in the south east that did have a serious slum problem *and* a substantial industrial economy, the pattern was the same. Slums had once dotted every part of the city but those in the richer boroughs had, by the mid-1960s, mostly been redeveloped.⁴² Those that remained were in the old working-class strongholds of the industrial east and north-east and the docklands, also east, on both banks of the Thames.⁴³

The 'twilight area' became the district of a British city where housing need and other forms of poverty, no longer spread among the working classes as a whole, flourished. The picture that emerges from the confluence of the data produced by the work on postwar poverty and postwar urban decline is that by the mid-1960s in Britain housing need had become a highly specific index of deprivation and, depending on the political persuasion of the commentator, dysfunction of the householders within.⁴⁴ Dorothy Wedderburn, a colleague of Abel-Smith and Townsend made the isolation of the poorest people from the rest of British society, and the gulf between their modes of living and those of the majority vivid when she wrote, "jumble sales ... [are] an important agent of redistribution in an affluent society in which far more people have good clothes to throw away."⁴⁵ The slums and twilight areas and their inhabitants were visible reminders of the failure of the welfare state and the managed economy to reach everyone.

Part II: Slums and Social Democracy

⁴⁰ Yorkshire and Humberside: 11,300; North West: 15,630; West Midlands: 9,284; South Eastern Counties: 1,408; Greater London: 3,279. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Housing Statistics: Great Britain* no. 4 (1967), Table 33, p. 39. The *Local Housing Statistics* series includes numbers of people displaced by region and I am planning to analyze the displacement caused by slum clearance by region. Population estimates from mid-1967 from Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Welsh Office, *Local Housing Statistics* no. 5 (1968), Table 5, pp. 7, 11, 21, 29. South East: 17,088,000; Yorkshire and Humberside: 4,782,900; North West: 6, 755, 900; West Midlands: 5, 067,400.

⁴¹ MHLG, *Living in a Slum*, 3; Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 316. On the regional characteristics of deindustrialization see Jim Tomlinson, "De-Industrialization: Strengths and Weaknesses as a Key Concept for Understanding Post-War British History." *Urban History* 47, no. 2 (2020): 199-219. On the long history of the shift from the heavy industrial economy of the north to a services economy and light-to medium industry in the south see Peter Scott, *Triumph of the South: A Regional Economic History of Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007), ch. 2; Heath and Payne, "Social Mobility," 255-264.

⁴² London Housing Survey: Milner Holland Committee: Research Papers: Questionnaire on Housing Stock to 87 Local Authorities in GLC Area qs. 6-9, TNA/HLG 39/98.

⁴³ Tomlinson, "De-Industrialization," 205.

⁴⁴ This impression received state sanction in the Ministry of Housing's *Living in a Slum* (17) and the Department of the Environment's studies of London, Birmingham, and Liverpool (*Inner London, Unequal City* and *Change or Decay*, respectively). A more qualified endorsement appears in Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, chs. 13-16, which was based on data gathered in 1968-69.

⁴⁵ Wedderburn, "Poverty in Britain Today," 267.

In the previous chapter we saw that the local authorities charged with ameliorating housing need were forced to develop systems to rank the many thousands of people experiencing it. We further saw that the systems they developed were devoted to selecting families that matched as closely as possible a localized version of the ‘English social democrat,’ a Solihull social democrat, a Lewisham social democrat, a Manchester social democrat. Faced with the task of sorting applications with only broad statutes to go on, they took the aim of making council housing the homes of the respectable, stable white working class as far as they could.

This was, however, contrary to the aims of the people who were making policy at the national level. Despite the racialization of council housing as the home of the *English* working class, Whitehall and Westminster understood council housing as a force for integration, not exclusion: removing housing need was a primary way of achieving the new, fairer social order of industrial imperial social democracy. To the policy-makers of Whitehall, slum dwellers were citizens, with as much right to have their needs met, as anyone else. The slums those people lived in were the largest and most visible reminder that the welfare state and the planned economy had not yet achieved what they had set out to do; housing need was construed as preventing integration into the polity, and so the new estates for the English social democrat and his family were only one piece of the puzzle. If council estates were the positive solution to housing need, ‘healthy, pleasant homes for our people,’ slum clearance, the elimination of unfit housing, and the control and prevention of exploitation by slum landlords, was the negative. Previously understood mostly as a racialized project of public health, after the Second World War slum clearance took on a new valency as mode of integration. In the introduction to their seventh report, *Moving from the Slums*, published to complement the Housing Repairs and Rents Act, CHAC did not mince words:

The resumption of slum clearance...is a long awaited opportunity for attacking once more the wretched conditions which still restrict and darken too many lives. Our object now must be eradication.⁴⁶

Similarly, whilst Minister of Housing and Local Government Harold Macmillan wrote in the *Supplement* to the Ministry’s Housing Manual, “The People need more homes. They need them quickly. This is the most urgent of all social services...we have to think of the future as well as the present.”⁴⁷ Though this echoes the racial logic of eugenics by invoking the ‘future’ of the ‘People’, Macmillan signalled that slum clearance was now, like council housing, one of a suite of social services for *all* of the people. The slum problem was what it had always been, that it was impossible to lead a ‘decent’ family life in the slum, but now slum dwellers were to be moved, as quickly as possible, into the very place, the council house, that would turn them into the English social democratic family. Slum dwellers received their right to rehousing ahead of all other applicants because the “unspeakable decay” of their houses “frustrate[s] any attempt at home-making.”⁴⁸ Making a home, with all the consumer goods and trappings postwar life could

⁴⁶ CHAC, *Moving from the Slums*, 1. See also Jennings, *Societies in the Making* on housing as a public service: “In the sphere of housing the need to provide the elementary requirement of shelter of a kind conducive to physical health...[and] the secondary effects of housing and town planning on the strength and nature of the social bond as expressed through human relationships” (2). See also Norman Dennis, *People and Planning: The Sociology of Housing in Sunderland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), ch. 7 and Donnison, *Government of Housing*, chs. 10-11.

⁴⁷ Harold Macmillan, foreword to *Houses 1952: Second Supplement to the Housing Manual, 1949* (London: HMSO, 1952).

⁴⁸ CHAC, *Moving from the Slums*, 2. On the axiomatic acceptance that a slum could not be a home, see chs. 1 and 2.

offer marked that family's successful integration into a recovered and expanded British prosperity.⁴⁹

Slum clearance, like estate construction, therefore became a social service that the postwar Labour government pushed to nationalise and standardise.⁵⁰ Under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, local authorities lost their sole control over slum clearance as Labour removed planning power from all 1,441 local authorities in England and Wales and concentrated it in the hands of the 145 County Councils. Lewis Silkin, the Minister of Town Planning argued that the new planning system would “the land of the country is used in the best interests of the whole people.”⁵¹ Observers commented that the Act would force ‘too conservative’ local authorities up to the mark, restrain those ‘too progressive’ and, overall, the Act’s requirement that all planning authorities submit detailed ‘development plans’ for the next five, ten, and twenty years would make the country move in a unified, positive direction.⁵²

County Councils were exhorted to find “a proper balance” between “the clearance of slums...the redevelopment of obsolete and badly laid out areas,” the needs of industry, agriculture, and of preserving Britain’s flora and fauna.⁵³ Not only had they to work with the several local authorities in their districts, they were required to consider the housing needs of the whole jurisdiction, which could be several authorities, in all their planning decisions.⁵⁴ The development plans had to include estimates from every local authority in their district of housing need and the *Housing Manual* of 1949 reminded planners and managers that estimates of housing need must consist “not merely [of homes] for families already on the waiting lists of the housing managers, but also for the need arising out of the removal of unfit and obsolescent houses and the redevelopment of central areas.”⁵⁵ Planning authorities had to estimate housing needs of their communities for the next two decades and they had to include provisions for ‘redistributing’ population by abating overcrowding and clearing slums and the estimated housing needs of the community for the next two decades.⁵⁶ Housing need was no longer solely part of the law of public housing, but a component of all town planning law in Britain, and it was no longer overseen only by local authorities, but was written into regional and national ‘development plans’ as well.⁵⁷

For a time there was a sense that slum clearance, elimination of housing need, and the production of the harmonious, homogenous, social-democratic English community would all

⁴⁹ See ch. 3; Cmd. 6609, 2; Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 123-24.

⁵⁰ Other scholars (most recently Alan Murie, *The Right to Buy? Selling of Public and Social Housing* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2016), 3-4) have argued that it was not until 1980 that local discretion as principle and practice of housing law was abandoned; this section provides a counterargument to that claim.

⁵¹ H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1947) vol. 432 col. 947.

⁵² C. W. Seddon, “Town and County Planning Act, 1947: Delegation to County Districts,” article published by the National Housing and Town Planning Council, April 1948, 6, BL/W26-8158.

⁵³ 432 H. C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1947) cols. 947-48.

⁵⁴ G. N. C. Swift, “Town and County Planning Act, 1947: Administration in Counties,” article published by the National Housing and Town Planning Council, April 1948, 2-3, BL/W26-8158.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Health, *Housing Manual* (London: HMSO, 1949), 14.

⁵⁶ Town and Country Planning Association, *Planning Britain's Land: A Summary of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947* (London: Town and Country Planning Association, 1948), 8, BL/8289.c.21.

⁵⁷ See TNA/HLG 98/41, also correspondence between the Ministry of Health and West Ham County Borough, TNA/HLG 98/20, and Southampton Council, TNA/HLG 98/23. See e.g. Herefordshire County Written Development Plan, 1947-51 and Maps 34.d20 - Herefordshire Town and Country Planning Act Survey 1951, BL/Maps 34.d20 and A. G. Jury, *The Survey Report of the City of Glasgow Development Plan: Quinquennial Review 1960* (Glasgow: Glasgow Corporation, [1960]); City of Liverpool, *Liverpool Builds: 1945-1965* (Liverpool: Liverpool Corporation, 1967), BL/Wf2/1930.

happen. At first, the boundaries between slum clearance and other interventions into the urban landscape were blurry. As we saw in chapter three, housing need was briefly generalized among the entire population immediately after the Second World War, and lost, for a while, its status as an index of deprivation and dysfunction. So, for a while, “there is scope for experiment,” wrote the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in *Flatlets for Old People* (1958). The booklet, a design manual for local authorities, was suffused with the technocratic optimism of postwar social democracy.⁵⁸ New solutions to any and all problems could be tried, and these flatlets are an example of how local authorities were instructed to ‘experiment’ in catering to the needs of people who were not the nuclear family, but nevertheless could, via planning, be folded into social-democratic Britain. In these flatlets, planners created designs where single old people or married couples would have their own bed-sitting room and a kitchenette, but would share bathrooms and toilets, summarised as, “accommodation mid-way between self-contained dwellings and hostels providing care.” They were exactly the kind of innovation that relied on a homogenous, gendered community adhering collectively to particular standards of behaviour that social-democratic town planning was designed to make.⁵⁹ Plymouth Council, for example, highlighted their use of *Flatlets for Old People* when they were replacing the slums of the city centre. Just as the manual had recommended “good management” and “kindly assistance” by a live-in warden or husband-and-wife team, Plymouth’s 24-flatlet block at Curtis Street, Devonport, was “under the supervision of a Warden and his wife.”⁶⁰

Despite the sunny outlook of *Flatlets for Old People* and its successor, *More Flatlets for Old People* (1960), unfit housing, council housing, and the people living in either were not submerged by the social-democratic revisions of either town planning or council housing law. If anything their legal position grew more distinct. In the first instance, the 1949 and subsequent Housing Acts retained the slum clearance provisions unchanged from the interwar acts, so much so that the phrase ‘working class’ was not deleted there as it had been elsewhere, leading solicitors to point out that it was still legal, in 1959, to build back-to-backs if they were intended for the “leisured classes.”⁶¹ More consequentially, until 1977 residents of slums designated for clearance remained the only people to whom the government was obliged to offer a house, and were therefore the only people who did not have to satisfy the extensive eligibility criteria local authorities developed to select for the English social democrat and his family.⁶² Finally, although subsidies for ‘general needs’ council housing were revised, abolished, brought back, and revised again throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the incentives for local authorities to clear slums only increased. The Conservatives’ Housing Repairs and Rents Act, 1954, defined ‘unfit for human habitation’ as a set of physical standards for the first time in the hope that local authorities would

⁵⁸ Ministry of Housing and Local Government, introduction to *Flatlets for Old People* (London: HMSO, 1958), 4. See also their chronicle of the success of this experiment, *Old People’s Flatlets at Stevenage: An Account of the Project with an Appraisal* (London: HMSO, 1966).

⁵⁹ For instance, the report on Ross Court, the flatlets at Stevenage, concluded, “To some of the loneliness and disengagement of old age there is no solution. And in a new town, which has not been built long enough for people to have grown up together, one type of social relationship which sustains the aged is unquestionably lacking. At least at Ross Court the more sociable have found pleasure and consolation in the company of the other residents and are not entirely dependent on the sometimes fitful attentions of their families in the town.” (*Old People’s Flatlets at Stevenage*, 55).

⁶⁰ Town Clerk’s Office, Report on Post-War Housing, GR/JMS, City of Plymouth, 20 April 1960, PLY/712/2/10; MHLG, *Flatlets*, 5-6.

⁶¹ A. Norman Schofield and Harry B. Sales, *Housing Law and Practice* 4th ed. (London: Shaw & Sons, 1966), note to p. 27.

⁶² Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977, ss. 3-5.

apply a more uniform standard so that the country could have a proper accounting of the scale of the 'slum problem.' It also reduced exchequer subsidies for general needs housing, and increased them for housing built to replace cleared slums.⁶³ Subsidies for 'general needs' housing were abolished entirely in 1956, and the Conservatives only reinstated them under pressure in the Housing Act, 1961.⁶⁴ They were still, however, lower (£8 or £24 per dwelling) than subsidies for developments rehousing 'overspill' populations from 'congested' areas or those for housing that was part of large clearance and redevelopment projects (both £28 per dwelling).⁶⁵ That Act was the also the first to offer incentives for multi-storey blocks of flats: each approved flat in a block of flats of four storeys received a subsidy of £8; flats in five-storey buildings, £14; and those in six-storey buildings £26, plus an additional £1 15s. per flat for each storey above six.⁶⁶ Labour continued, even expanded, this approach and the Labour years of the mid-1960s were the peak of British slum clearance.⁶⁷

The final major addition to Britain's law of housing that marked out the households of those in housing need was the introduction, in the Housing Act, 1961, of the concept of a 'house in multiple occupation.' This was a dwelling rented out to multiple tenants or one shared by the landlord and one or more tenants, where some or all of the amenities, kitchen, bathroom and toilet, were shared by every person living in the house.⁶⁸ Homes shared by more than one family were placed in a separate legal category, and subject to stricter scrutiny, than dwellings of one householder and his family and by the same token one householder occupying one dwelling with his family was now the norm in law, which it had never been before. 'Multiple occupation' was developed to complement the overcrowding and unfitness standards from 1935 and 1954, respectively, as stories of landlords dodging clearance and demolition orders on technicalities proliferated.⁶⁹ The term quickly became shorthand for substandard, unfit dwellings, inhabitants either poverty-stricken or delinquent, and rapacious landlords. The immigrant landlord exploiting his newly-arrived compatriots became an especial bogey – *The Times*' subheading for an article about the passage of the Housing Act, 1961 was IMMIGRATION CAUSE OF NEW SLUMS.⁷⁰ In their well-known study of Sparkbrook, Birmingham, a working-class neighbourhood that had become a popular destination for migrants from Pakistan, John Rex and Robert Moore devoted a chapter to "The Lodging-House."⁷¹ They argued, "For the formal legal rules of conduct to apply in rented accommodation it is necessary firstly that the contestants know the rules and secondly that

⁶³ Housing Repairs and Rents Act, 1954, 2 Eliz. 2 c. 53, ss7-9.

⁶⁴ Peter Weiler, "Labour and the Land: From Municipalization to the Land Commission, 1951-1971," *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 317.

⁶⁵ Housing Act, 1961 c. 65 ss. 1-5.

⁶⁶ Housing Act, 1961 c. 65 s. 3, s. 5(1).

⁶⁷ Yelling, "Incidence of Slum Clearance," 235-36. See also *Housing Statistics: Great Britain* series (1968-2000); and the Housing Returns prepared by the Department of Health for Scotland and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for England and Wales (1950-1967). Yelling is the only scholar who has attempted to quantify number of people displaced. See also slum clearance graphs in appendix.

⁶⁸ Housing Act, 1961, c. 65.

⁶⁹ "Minister Finds Squalor Near Westminster." *Times*, July 12, 1961, 14. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed August 7, 2023); "Whose neighbour?" *Sunday Times*, October 22, 1967, 13. *The Sunday Times Historical Archive* (accessed August 7, 2023).

⁷⁰ "Minister Finds Squalor Near Westminster." *Times*, July 12, 1961, 14. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed August 7, 2023); Cmd. 2605, ch. 9, "The Coloured Landlord and the Coloured Tenant;" Jon Davies, "The Tenants of Indian and Pakistani Landlords," *Race Today* (August 1970): 284-85.

⁷¹ John Rex and Robert Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), ch. 5.

life should still be tolerable when the rules are applied.”⁷² The multiple occupation provisions were a tool, the political elite argued, to force landlords and tenants to maintain dwellings suitable for “civilised” society.⁷³

The Housing Act, 1961 signalled again that unfit, obsolete housing were the homes of the deviant, the delinquent, and the uncivilised, but it *also* signalled that national politicians, despite their differences, broadly shared an understanding that council housing should become mass-produced homes for the poorest members of society.⁷⁴ Contrary to Aneurin Bevan’s vision of council housing as an equally respectable and respected mode of living as owner-occupation or renting privately, the Housing Minister, Henry Brooke singled out the groups that his Bill was to help: the overcrowded, the elderly, and those who lived in the “worst areas” of England and Wales, a list of which was appended to the White Paper preceding the bill.⁷⁵ Labour’s opposition to the bill was largely confined to protesting the terms on which the exchequer would subsidise the local authorities, and Labour MPs spoke almost as much as the Conservatives about the ‘appalling’ condition of the slums.⁷⁶

The effects of the decision to concentrate local authorities’ efforts on slum clearance were like a wave that built up and broke over council housing. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, the press of housing need was such that local authorities could select for the English social democrat and his family whilst remaining within the bounds of the law.⁷⁷ But pressure from the central government on local authorities to take tenants through compulsory rehousing programs was not without effects. In their summary of Oldham’s report on housing progress the Ministry of Housing and Local Government noted in September 1955 that the town had a severe slum problem and that “The local authority’s...[general] needs are represented by a waiting list of about 2,000.” However, the secretary at the Ministry of Housing further commented, “the council found that much fewer people were on the [general] waiting list [from slums] than might have been expected.”⁷⁸ This finding, though, confirms what we might expect given the changes, even in 1955, that had already taken place in the socio-economic position of people experiencing housing need. Whether it was due to concerns over the cost of a council house, reluctance to move to a suburban estate, inability to satisfy eligibility criteria or to knowledge that they were likely to be rehoused via clearance anyway, the people in greatest housing need in Oldham were *not* axiomatically applying for council housing. Neither Mr Dovey, the Ministry secretary, nor Edward Haines, Oldham’s Town Clerk appear to have speculated on why that was the case in their six months’ correspondence in Oldham’s file in the National Archives. What that file does show is that it took all that time, some attention to the town’s slum problem in the national press, the reduction of general needs subsidies under the Repairs and Rents Act, and a visit from Ministry civil servants before Oldham Borough Council agreed to make slum clearance their

⁷² Rex and Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict*, 143.

⁷³ “Call To Modernize Older Houses.” *Times*, September 22, 1961, 5. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed August 7, 2023).

⁷⁴ Cmnd. 3282, p. 58; “The Housing Programme,” Cmnd. 2838 (1965) pp. 14-15; Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 330.

⁷⁵ 637 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1961) cols. 1083-84; Cmnd, 1290, Appendix A.

⁷⁶ Second Reading of the Housing Bill, 1961. 637 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th series) (1961) cols. 960-1090.

⁷⁷ Harry Street, Geoffrey Howe and Geoffrey Bindman, *Anti-Discrimination Legislation: The Street Report* (London: Political and Economic Planning, 1967), 80-82.

⁷⁸ E. Dovey, Housing Repairs and Rents Act 1954: Slum Clearance Proposals: Oldham C. B. HQ Ref. 1474/8/51; NW. Ref. 1474/717/1/47, 9 September 1955; various correspondence; Edward Haines to the Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 6 March, 1956, ref. 1474/8/51, TNA/HLG 47/923.

priority. Haines wrote to Dovey in March 1956, “In view of the large number of unfit houses in the borough (substantially over 11,169)...[the Council] has decided that, following the completion of dwellings already approved by the Ministry (of which 50% only are allocated to slum clearance), all new dwellings shall be allocated for the re-housing of residents of slum properties.”⁷⁹

The development of council housing into the home of people who gained their homes through rehousing, rather than applicants who satisfied eligibility criteria and residential qualifications is illustrated even more clearly by London because its unique governance makes the process easy to see. In 1964 the London County Council’s Housing department produced a graph for the Milner Holland Committee, a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry convened by then-Housing Minister Keith Joseph into “the condition of rental housing in Greater London,” in the wake of the Rachman slum crisis. This graph, below, broke down the offers of tenancy that the LCC had made over the preceding eighteen years (1945-63) into two categories: “waiting list families” and “rehousing and other priority purposes.”

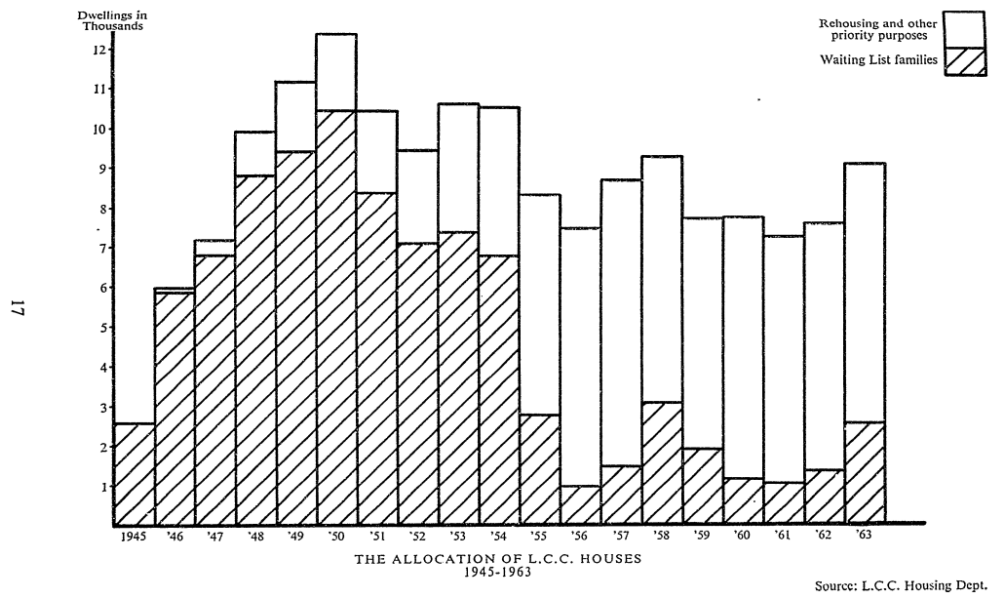


Fig. 4.1: Allocations to LCC houses, 1945-1963.⁸⁰

Waiting list families’ were families who had applied for an LCC house on their own initiative and made the waiting list after satisfying eligibility criteria. As the graph shows, they were a large majority of families moving onto LCC estates right up to the passage of the Housing Repairs and Rents Act, 1954, but from 1955 on the proportions were almost directly reversed.⁸¹ ‘Rehousing and other priority purposes’ tenants took over. Rehousing tenants were, of course, those from housing closed or demolished as slums or for urban renewal; in keeping with the tradition of official discretion ‘priority purposes’ was a category broad and open to interpretation,

⁷⁹ E. Dovey, Housing Repairs and Rents Act 1954: Slum Clearance Proposals: Oldham C. B. HQ Ref. 1474/8/51; NW. Ref. 1474/717/1/47, 9 September 1955; various correspondence; Edward Haines to the Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 6 March, 1956, ref. 1474/8/51, TNA/HLG 47/923.

⁸⁰ Cmd. 2605, 1964, p. 17

⁸¹ The same trend occurred around the country, notably Bristol (see Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 122); and Wales, which Secretary of State noted and approved of (Secretary of State for Wales, *Wales 1964*, Cmnd. 2602, 1965, 95).

but a pattern among them nevertheless emerged.⁸² In common with other conurbations, the LCC's priority rehousing offers were most frequently made to families facing homelessness and consequent separation, especially if the children were in, or likely to be taken into, care, and families where one or more members were suffering pulmonary tuberculosis.⁸³

Part III: Knowing the Slums

As we saw in chapter three, postwar council housing did not abandon, but rather expanded the system of knowledge production that had underpinned the enterprise since its Victorian beginnings. Instead, the expansion of council housing was matched by a concomitant expansion of that knowledge production system to investigate, categorise and manage anyone who fell within the scope of public housing law. As the number of laws defining their circumstances as abnormal and unacceptable grew, slum dwellers and slum landlords came under greater scrutiny and the postwar willingness to make slum clearance a means of integrating the people of the slums into polity inaugurated a new phase in the discursive construction of the slum. A small army of social scientists set out to investigate 'housing need,' to monitor and analyse the economic and social changes taking place across Britain and their effects on the residents of places accounted slums, all part of the 'rediscovery of poverty.' A representative example is the 1970 report by the specially formed Research and Development Group within the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, entitled *Living in a Slum*. This short, well-illustrated report about the redevelopment of St Mary's ward, Oldham, Lancashire was the result of an eight-year collaboration between Ministry civil servants, Oldham Corporation, private consultants and the building firm carrying out the redevelopment.⁸⁴ Reports like this one, or academics moving in and out of Ministry committees as was the case with CHAC, furthered the professionalization of the academic disciplines to which these social scientists belonged (sociology, geography, economics, demography, psychology), tightened the links between the academy, the civil service, and the voluntary sector. This ongoing process also modernized the approach of the civil service to the work of policy-making; instead of the disinterested inquiry CHAC practised in its early postwar years, it and other Whitehall committees turned increasingly to the work of professional social scientists, presenting their research and policy recommendations as derived from neutral academia.⁸⁵

⁸² On official discretion see e.g. Kingsley Wood, *The Law and Practice with Regard to Housing in England and Wales* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 17-18.

⁸³ Herbert Davies Chalke, "Housing Problems of the Tuberculous," WELL/GC/200/E/1/29; "Housing and the Tuberculosis Family," WELL/GC/200/E/1/25; "Immigration as a Factor in Tuberculosis Control," WELL/GC/200/E/1/27; City of Liverpool Housing Committee, *Rules for the acceptance of Applications for Housing and the Allocation of Accommodation together with a report from the Director of Housing thereon*, approved by Housing Committee 7 December 1964, LRO/H 643/HOU; Manchester Corporation Housing Department, "Selection of Tenants for Council Houses," 13 February 1956, item 507, in Minutes of the Tenancies Sub-Committee, July 1954-April 1956, MAN/GB127.Council Minutes-Housing (Tenancies) Sub-Committee/10.

⁸⁴ MHLG, introduction to *Living in a Slum*, 1.

⁸⁵ E.g. Peter Townsend who co-wrote *The Poor and the Poorest* went on to found the Child Poverty Action Group; John Coward, Secretary and Manager of the Notting Hill Housing Trust, and later its first CEO, gave evidence to the Select Committee on Race Relations and Housing, convened in 1971, see LMA/LMA/4462/P/01/012 and his obituary in *The Guardian* 31 December 2013, accessed 16 February 2024 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/30/john-coward-obituary>>. Peter Willmott, co-author of *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) was one of the researchers who worked on the Inner Area Studies series which were influential in shaping housing law and policy in the 1970s.

For some of the social scientists doing this work, like sociologist David Smith originally from Bermuda, Peter Townsend, co-author of *The Poor and the Poorest*, and the founders of the non-profit think tank the Runnymede Trust, Anthony Lester, Jim Rose and Dipak Nandy, this was explicitly political, a strategy to push those in power to lessen inequality, poverty and discrimination.⁸⁶ The publication of the study that launched the ‘rediscovery’, Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend’s *The Poor and the Poorest* (London: Bell, 1965), was publicized as the means to raise support for the newly-founded non-profit organization, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).⁸⁷ For others, like academics co-opted to serve on parliamentary committees of inquiry, their area of expertise overlapped with the policy priorities of civil servants; their conclusions mediated by the state-sponsored publications in which they appeared.⁸⁸ Still others – social workers, health visitors, charitable organisation staff and volunteers, Citizens’ Advice Bureaux workers, journalists, activists – collected their own data; it turned up in government reports, sociological studies and in newspaper articles, depending on what use its authors wanted to make of it.⁸⁹

However, the increasing sophistication of the knowledge production apparatus did not change the fact that the aims of council housing and slum clearance remained the same: to make English social democrats. But the people who came to council housing through rehousing or priority schemes did not have to satisfy the eligibility criteria designed to tie them to a localized version of Britishness, and often they did not.⁹⁰ David Donnison, prolific scholar of social policy who served on the Committee on Housing in Greater London noted that the “always uncertain” relationship between housing and health had become even more so with the decline of ‘environmental’ diseases like tuberculosis. At the same time, he argued that even as legal standards for what a slum was were tightened, local authorities were still offering estimates of their slum districts based on what they were “administratively and financially capable of dealing with,” not wanting to give their cities “a bad name,” or based on “ambitious and aggressive”

⁸⁶ Peter Townsend, “Poverty, Socialism and Labour in Power: based on a lecture given before a Fabian audience, November 1966,” Fabian Tract no. 317 (January 1967), 1-3; Ann Dummett, “The Runnymede Trust 1968-1987,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 14, no. 2 (1987): 89.

⁸⁷ Pat Thane and Ruth Davidson, *The Child Poverty Action Group 1965-2015* (London: Child Poverty Action Group, 2016), 10.

⁸⁸ John Barry Cullingworth, a professor of urban planning at the University of Glasgow, David Donnison, a professor of social policy at the London School of Economics, and Ruth Glass, director of University College London’s Centre for Urban Studies were three academics who worked especially closely with CHAC and other Parliamentary housing research committees. See “Professor Barry Cullingworth,” *The Times* 30 March 2005, p. 62; Howard Glennerster, obituary of David Donnison, *The Guardian* 20 May 2018, accessed 28 October 2023 < <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/20/david-donnison-obituary>>; Anne Pimlott Baker, “Glass [*née* Lazarus; *other married name* Durant], Ruth Adele (1912-1990),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, <https://doi-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/39973>).

⁸⁹ See e.g. Pansy Jeffrey, Citizens Advice Bureau worker and long-time anti-racist campaigner in West London who worked closely with the Notting Hill Housing Trust and Shelter, including Bruce Kenrick, “Ms Pansy Jeffrey: Founder,” The Pepper Pot Centre, n.d., accessed 12 July, 2024, <https://www.pepperpotcentre.org.uk/moreinformationaboutpansy> and LMA/LMA/4462/P, and Sam Younger, “Kenrick, Bruce Henderson (1920-2007),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, <https://doi-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/98546>), and Des Wilson, another early leader of Shelter and squatting activist, see Andreas Whittam Smith, “When She Needed Shelter, You Were There,” *The Independent* 1 September 1996, accessed 12 July 2024, < <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/when-she-needed-shelter-you-were-there-1361476.html>> and papers of the Golborne Neighbourhood Association, HFA/367.19 GOL and LMA/LMA/4462/P/01/010/001.

⁹⁰ Glass, *London’s Newcomers*, 47; Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 337.

plans for redevelopment.⁹¹ Faced with this kind of variation in aims and methods, investigators fell back on longstanding discursive construction of the slums as the home of the deviant, the foreign, the dangerous to interpret what they were seeing: the likelihood that living in twilight areas did have family structures different from that of the white, heterosexual nuclear family. That understanding was written into the knowledge made about the people who came to council housing through rehousing or priority schemes, so the poorest people in Britain found themselves caught in a system of house and home unable to treat with them outside a very particular racialized and gendered framework.

Given the diversity of people investigating the slums, of the people and places they studied, and the varying aims they had for the research they conducted, it is all the more striking that the residents of slums are depicted in the same or similar fashion again and again. The LCC's Child Welfare Officer summarised families selected for a pilot homelessness rehousing scheme in 1957: "[single] mother is an extremely good housekeeper [with seven children] and keeps home spotlessly clean;" "3 children [out of 5]...home [from care] on trial...boy has not settled down very well...Father is not very co-operative...1 child still in care of Middlesex County Council."⁹² Identical language appeared in the Notting Hill Housing Trust's list of applicants between 1966 and 1970 and they summarised their cases like this:

<i>Name, Address and Family</i>	<i>Present Accommodation</i>	<i>Present Circumstances</i>
Mrs Nora Davidson* 34 *** *** Estate H*** NW** B[oy]-9 B-8 G[irl]-4	Council flat. 3 rooms, kitchen/bathroom.	Flat in old Council block. Adequate for family. Problem is the area. Family and friends too far. Area is rough, little girl gets insulted by older children because she is half-caste. ⁹³

To their confusion and consternation, what those investigating the slums found was a social and sexual economy completely at odds with that of the white, stable, comfortably-housed nuclear family promised by council housing.⁹⁴ They fell back on the old, longstanding stereotypes of the slums to make sense of it.⁹⁵ Reverend Downham gave the London Council of Social Services, a non-profit affiliated with the British Council of Churches, the case history of Mr and Mrs A, "a Bombay Jew married to an English girl some twenty years his junior;" they

⁹¹ Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 288; Dennis, *People and Planning*, 120-21; see also Pearl Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats: Some of the Human Problems Involved in Multi-Storey Housing* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1971), ch. 2. SHAC echoed Donnison in stronger terms, see *Scotland's Older Houses* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1967), 24-25.

⁹² Table appended to letter from Children's Officer to Mrs Serota 4 June, 1959, LMA/LCC/CH/M/42/004. [PDF p. 282]. It is perhaps not a coincidence that this case was that of Miss Gaffney, who had only two children, and had got her place in the scheme because one of the houses happened to have an attic flat where the Gaffney family could fit – another example of how policy was flexible and contracted and expanded to fit the families, something that I discuss in detail in chapter 3.

* *Details changed to preserve anonymity.*

⁹³ Notting Hill Housing Trust Applications: 1966-1970, LMA/LMA/4462/P/01/014.

⁹⁴ Cmd. 2605; Dennis, *People and Planning*, 117-18, 178-79. This also received portrayal in fiction, see Monica Dickens, *Kate and Emma* (London: Heinemann, 1964).

⁹⁵ See e.g. the comments made by MPs Victor Goodhew, Harriet Slater, James Watts, and Donald Wade during the Second Reading of the Bill that became the Housing Act, 1961. 637 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th series) (1961) cols. 1007-09, 1023-28.

lived, with their ten-year-old son in a “dark, damp, dismal basement” of a house occupied by thirty Pakistani men. Their furniture was ruined by damp, their communal backyard was “littered with refuse which has been thrown out of the window by the other occupants” and “the drains and toilet have been stopped up by rice.” Reverend Downham insisted that the “constant strain and tension” of the situation had driven Mrs A to have an affair with her employer; that the men regularly brought prostitutes home and propositioned Mrs A; and, worst of all, the “sensitive and imaginative” boy was forced to witness all of this.⁹⁶ As well as arguing that the Pakistani men were encouraging prostitution, harming their neighbours in the process, Downham also listed several families living in one or two dilapidated rooms whose children were “in need of child guidance” or “abnormal” (two Cypriot families and one mixed West Indian-English family).

Housing conditions allowed observers of the poor to pass judgement on their family life, stressing all the while not only their distance from English family life but the real dangers they posed. Government and academic inquiries highlighted not just poverty, but the failure of many households to form the nuclear family unit and contribute meaningfully to Britain’s social democracy because of it. In the early 1960s, after a decade of mass immigration of former colonial subjects, the racialization of British slums became more intense. Paul Gilroy and others following him have argued that the politics of race in postwar Britain are “quite inconceivable away from the context of the inner-city.”⁹⁷ Migrants to Britain, most of them former colonial subjects, frequently moved into the cheapest neighbourhoods they could find, many of which happened to be exactly these older, inner-city areas that were on their way to being, or were already, considered slums.⁹⁸ The poverty, deprivation and dysfunction of the slums acted as confirmation of long-held racialized and gendered stereotypes about the kind of people living in them. They saw these differences as confirmation of longstanding stereotypes of various groups of colonial subjects, now easily observable in the metropole, and as confirmation of stereotypes about slum dwellers’ foreignness from British norms and mores.

This was the conclusion of the reasoning about difference that Britain had derived from its imperial experience and which had shaped professional and political understandings of slums and their inhabitants since the late nineteenth century. Migrants had dangerously low standards and would commit immoral acts: a vicar in Kentish Town argued that immigrants were especially overcrowded partly because they accepted conditions that no ‘Englishman’ would tolerate, an argument that had been repeated about each new migrant group since the arrival of Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms in the 1880s, but he also noted that getting a room was so difficult for

⁹⁶ D. C. Downham, LCSS Report, Appendix C, TNA/HLG 39/85. His original contribution to the LCSS report was not anonymized. The original LCSS report and contributions are held by the LMA and have been seen by the author. As well as submitting evidence to the Committee of Inquiry into the Housing Situation in Greater London the LCSS produced and published its own report, see Sheila Patterson (ed.), *Immigrants in London: A Study Group Report* (London: National Council of Social Science, 1963), BL/X.529/1222; similar interpretations on the morals and mores of Britons of colour were expressed in Burney, *Housing on Trial*, 35-36 and by the Ealing Community Relations Council’s Housing Sub-Committee, *Report on the Pilot Housing Survey* (London: Ealing Community Relations Council, [1970]), appendix 2, LMA/GLC/AR/HOD/10/009.

⁹⁷ Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black*, 311; James Rhodes and Laurence Brown, “The rise and fall of the ‘inner city’: race, space and urban policy in postwar England,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 17 (2018): 3243-59.

⁹⁸ R. J. Allerton, then of the LCC Housing Committee, written evidence to the London Housing Survey, 2 September 1964, p. 2, TNA/HLG 39/63; Glass, *London’s Newcomers*, 49-54. Allerton also served on the Committee on Housing in Greater London (the Milner Holland Committee).

migrants that those who did “feel that they cannot push a fellow countryman out.”⁹⁹ Even so, the vicar argued that the housing shortage was such that migrant families were forced to break up, “Married couples may have their children fostered out as a price for staying in their rooms, or the husband lives apart from his wife and children to prevent overcrowding,” and claimed outright abuse: “single coloured girls...have to be prepared to sleep with the landlord to get a room.”¹⁰⁰ Downham noted, finally, that even an Indian family of four where the parents were “good [and] affectionate” was struggling because their single room had no cooking facilities and their landlord forced them to eat in the café he owned. It was the “notorious Star Café...haunt of prostitutes and drug addicts,” so despite their parents’ best efforts, the two children were constantly exposed to the very worst influences.¹⁰¹

Overcrowding thus returned, explicitly racialized, but without having shed its associations with deviant sexuality. All-male South Asian households suggested a return to the deviant sexuality of the all-male casual wards chronicled by the sensational Victorian press; the presence of wives and daughters offered a return to similar culturalist panics about South Asian women in purdah, in the heart of the metropole.¹⁰² At the same time, the LCSS reported a story that could have come from the pages of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1882): a family of four shared one room; the boy shared a bed with his sister and was now in Borstal for what the LCSS referred to only as “offences committed at night.” The vicar of St Pancras continued that in general teenage boys subjected to this kind of severe overcrowding “wander abroad at nights, take pills to keep awake and get into trouble,” combining longstanding concerns about delinquency and deviancy in overcrowded conditions with the new uneasiness about unruly adolescents and drugs.¹⁰³ Slums were haunts of the dispossessed and dangerous, as Reverend Downham described finding the body of “an Irish vagrant” in a derelict church hall scheduled for clearance and how his parish was so run down that it attracted “alcoholics, vagrants and meths drinkers” who indulged in petty crime and harassed the residents who remained amid bomb sites and derelict buildings scheduled for clearance.¹⁰⁴ Faced with crime, high rents, and the fact that landlords allegedly preferred prostitutes because they could afford the rent and did not make

⁹⁹ LCSS Report, 4, TNA/HLG 39/85. On accepting worse conditions, see also Alderman Cotton, Committee of Inquiry into the Housing Situation in Greater London, notes of a meeting held 16 March 1964, 32-33, TNA/HLG 39/85; Housing Management Sub-Committee, “Residential Qualifications Required of Housing Applicants: Analysis of Information Supplied by Local Authorities,” RQE. 3, [1954], 3, TNA/HLG 37/30.

¹⁰⁰ LCSS Report, 4, TNA/HLG 39/85. Hole and Pountney, *Trends in Population, Housing and Occupancy*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Downham, LCSS Report, Appendix C, TNA/HLG 39/85.

¹⁰² Verity Saifullah Khan described this process in her article, “Pakistani women in Britain,” *New Community* 5, no. 1-2 (1976): 99-117. See also Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 187-88; Radhika Natarajan, “Saving Asian Marriages: Migration, Gender, and the Communal Politics of Welfare in 1970s Britain,” in *Global Labor Migration: New Directions* ed. Eileen Boris et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023), 141-42. On the importance of the zenana as a site for white Englishwomen to produce *professional* knowledge about brown Indian women see Janaki Nair, “Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen’s Writings, 1813-1940,” *Journal of Women’s History* 2, no. 1 (1990): 11-12 and Antoinette Burton, “Contesting the Zenana: The Mission to Make ‘Lady Doctors for India,’ 1874-1885,” *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 3 (1996): 373-75. See also Madihah F. Akhter, “In Her Own Right: Sovereignty and Gender in Princely Bhopal,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2020), 110-11.

¹⁰³ LCSS Report, 6, TNA/HLG 39/85. On the earlier fears of the young delinquent in the slums, see ch. 1; on the rise of the teenage delinquent see David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, 1920-1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), chs. 6-7. On the discursive formation of the ‘dangerous addict’, often “coloured,” in policy circles, see Christopher Hallam, *White Drug Cultures and Regulation in London, 1916-1960* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), ch. 8 esp. 184-87.

¹⁰⁴ Downham, LCSS Report, Appendix C, TNA/HLG 39/85.

trouble, the LCSS argued that every “respectable” family who could was fleeing these districts because “you can’t really expect to bring a child up properly here.”¹⁰⁵

Bad houses, exorbitant rents, and bad neighbourhoods were disastrous for mental health, community building, and stymied any chance of achieving social cohesion and racial harmony. A minister who had worked in both Jamaica and south London described his former parishioners changing from “cheerful” in Jamaica to “morose, and are apt to build up a negative outlook towards life” in London. The most common form of abuse was landlords attempting to force out rent-controlled tenants so that they could let at market rates; if the landlord was not white and the tenant was, “it causes intense hardship and considerable anti-coloured feeling.”¹⁰⁶ Alderman Cotton argued that there was no actual “hostility” between the new and old residents of Lambeth, but he did assert that *all* immigrants to Lambeth, “whether the Maltese, the West Indians, those from Darlington, the North-East or anywhere else,” were liable to be “truculent” and that there was an undeniable “coldness” between the white and the “coloured” residents of Lambeth, and he forecast serious racial tension if the situation continued unabated.¹⁰⁷

Even as they recognised that many residents of slums faced insurmountable barriers to moving, policy-makers were equally reluctant to allow this problem to hinder the goal of producing fit families from unfit slum residents. “Again some people are now occupying unfit houses at low rents are unwilling to leave them for new council houses at higher rents,” they wrote in their report for the year 1955, but “the public health aspect of this problem is one which must not be overlooked. Furthermore it is not unusual to find that families which moved reluctantly to new council houses soon reach the conclusion that the extra cost in rent is money well spent.”¹⁰⁸ When the Lambeth Borough Council came to give their evidence to the Milner Holland Committee, the Leader of the Council, Alderman Cotton, commented, “it looks as though we are a thoroughly immoral lot in Lambeth” because of the large proportion of immigrants “to whom marriage is of no consequence” and “the influx of Southern Irish girls,” whom he implied were coming to London to give birth to illegitimate children.¹⁰⁹ Once again, even as observers acknowledged the housing crisis, poor-quality housing was a way to articulate the ways in which residents of slums failed to assimilate into white, ‘respectable’ British society.

The people who were becoming eligible for council housing through slum clearance and other rehousing programs were those for whom the three-bedroom two-storey house or the two-bedroom flat in a tower block were impossible. Local authorities lamented that their growing clearance and rehousing duties were causing misallocation of resources on a grand scale. In evidence offered to CHAC in the 1950s, the Milner Holland Committee in the 1960s, and to the researchers conducting the Inner Area Studies in the 1970s, local authorities argued that the housing stock the central government had directed them to concentrate on, homes for young, five-person families with a male breadwinner and a housewife, was becoming more and more

¹⁰⁵ LCSS Report, 5, TNA/HLG 39/85.

¹⁰⁶ LCSS Report, 4, 6, TNA/HLG 39/85.

¹⁰⁷ Alderman Cotton, 16 March 1964, 32-33, TNA/HLG 39/85.

¹⁰⁸ MHLG Report for 1955, Cmd. 9876, 94-95.

¹⁰⁹ Alderman Cotton, 16 March 1964, 33, TNA/HLG 39/85. More men than women left Ireland for Britain, but in the early postwar years the proportion of women migrating to Britain from Ireland rose sharply. See Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2000), 159-68. On Irish women coming to Britain for abortions or to escape stigma in Ireland as unwed mothers, see Lindsay Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart, *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920-2018* (Cham: Springer International, 2019), ch. 1.

unsuitable for the real housing needs of their communities.¹¹⁰ Bringing people who did not match existing council housing was causing real strain, economic and political, on councils and their housing in every major city. Politically, it created “acute discontent” among people on the general waiting list for council housing, constrained by a range of criteria, especially residential qualifications, as they resented ‘priority’ category people who could not meet the standard eligibility criteria getting homes before them.¹¹¹ Revenue shortfalls increased as local authorities took on tenants who could not afford even the standard subsidised rent for their council house and required larger and larger rebates and also, not infrequently, other forms of social work like home help services for the elderly or intervention by child services.¹¹² Lastly, there were issues of supply, as the council sector across the country contended with a far higher than anticipated demand for, on the one hand, accessible one-bedroom flats or bedsits/studios for the single elderly and, on the other, larger houses for families of more than five people.¹¹³

By the 1970s council housing was being attacked on all fronts. Councils were criticised because slums remained and councils were not alleviating housing need fast enough; they were criticised because their own housing stock was poor quality; they were castigated for ignoring the wishes of their tenants and of their constituents at large, leaving council tenants and slum residents in terrible conditions.¹¹⁴ Liverpool Housing Department’s internal report on its slum clearance and rehousing program noted, in 1972, “Families in priority categories are becoming much more selective in terms of the type and location of the housing accommodation they will accept. Very real competition exists, between the priority categories, for any of the more attractive accommodation which the Housing Department is able to offer.”¹¹⁵ Vandalism was thought to be such a problem that the GLC’s District Manager denied the Hanbury Street Tenants’ Association’s request for a set of swings, a roundabout, a seesaw and a rocking horse for their estate’s playground on the grounds that “Experience all over London shows that, regrettably, equipment of the type requested very quickly becomes vandalized, even on our better estates.” He added that seesaws and roundabouts were very dangerous and the GLC did not want to incur liability.¹¹⁶ Elite liberal centre-left opinion represented by CHAC, remained convinced that the problem was merely one of supply, and they wrote, “Many West Indians are the

¹¹⁰ Between 1950 and 1955 three bedroom houses were a substantial majority of houses were three bedroom, see Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Report for the Period 1950/51 to 1954, Cmd. 9559 (London: HMSO, 1955), 9; Ministry of Housing and Local Government Report for the Year 1955 Cmd. 9876 (London: HMSO, 1956), 11 and also Appendix I, Table H, “Summary of information relating to traditional three-bedroom houses for which tenders or estimates were approved by the Ministry during 1951-55,” 111. See also e.g. “Slums don’t just disappear,” *The Guardian* 30 October, 1969, p. 12 on the collapse of industry and falling population in Liverpool and, to a lesser extent, Manchester, and its effect on the large estates and new towns and Ron Phillips, “The Black Masses and the Political Economy of Manchester,” *The Black Liberator* vol. 2, no. 4 (1976): 295-96, George Padmore Institute (hereafter GPI)/JOU/3/7.

¹¹¹ Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Overcrowding in Birmingham, October 1960, para. 28, BHM/BCC/1/AG/33/1/1. Judy Hillman, “Councils restive at new Act for homeless,” *The Guardian* 14 November 1977, p. 4; Donnison, *Government of Housing*, 291-92.

¹¹² J. B. Cullingworth, *English Housing Trends* (London: Bell, 1965), ch. 5.

¹¹³ D. V. Donnison, “What Kind of Houses Do We Need?” in *Essays on Housing* (London: Bell, 1965). See also SHAC, *Scotland’s Older Houses*, 21.

¹¹⁴ Dennis, *People and Planning*, ch. 7; Spitalfields Housing and Planning Rights Service “The Planning Service: Introduction,” in File re the Spitalfields Housing and Planning Rights Service (SHAPRS) c. 1979, [p. 23], THM/I/AVU/A/4/1.

¹¹⁵ Liverpool Corporation Housing Department, “Clearance Programme: Stage 2,” March 1972, 3, LRO/Hq 643 HOU; the same occurred in Bristol, see Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 151-52.

¹¹⁶ A. T. King to Richard Smith, 10 October 1977, THM/I/SPP/4/2/4/6.

archetype of the council house tenant, skilled artisans whose wives are prepared to go out to work to add to the family resources. If the present obstacles are removed it seems to us likely that they will follow the Irish into acceptance in the public sector.”¹¹⁷

In the early 1970s, between 1971 and 1973, a Select Committee of MPs from both major parties produced a series of reports on race relations and immigration. In the introduction to the report on housing, the committee explained that they had “focused our inquiry on the effects of the influx of coloured immigrants over the last ten or so years, and the strain on an already difficult housing situation imposed by very large numbers arriving in a country entirely strange to them”, highlighting how migrants of colour, for all that their housing issues “cannot be separated from the community at large” cause problems both novel and separate, for which the housing system is simply not prepared.¹¹⁸ The report went on to discuss ‘statistics’ or the lack thereof on people of colour, without clarifying what they meant by ‘statistics’. However, over the course of the report, it becomes clear that statistics meant how many people of colour there were, where they lived, what their family structures were like, and what forms of tenure they lived under. The committee declared itself “unfavourably impressed with the lack of progress” between local authorities and central government departments over what statistics to keep, why, and how: “We are surprised therefore that the general recognition of the inadequacy of records has not led already to something less haphazard.” The committee also rejected the argument that keeping statistics would cause or exacerbate discrimination: “All records, all facts, are necessarily discriminatory in the sense that they classify, but in themselves they are neutral and discrimination can only arise from their misuse.”¹¹⁹ The sense that arises from the Select Committee’s report on migrants and housing is that it is a vast and unknowable problem. Just as nineteenth-century slum dwellers did not know ‘how to live decently,’ the Select Committee suggested that neither Britons of colour nor the authorities knew what the problems were, how to solve them, and how the ‘housing problem’ had changed in their respective districts over time, or why. The urban underclass living in squalor had always been unknowable, un-English, and dangerous: the only solution was more knowledge.

Part IV: From Council House to Slum

Council estates were too bound up with whiteness and the stigma of the slums as the home of the non-white, non-British was too strong for those who came from the slums to fit easily into the English social democrat project. The gradual entry of people quite unlike the English social democrat and his family into council housing, the manner in which they were offered it, and the associations attached to the places they came from, the slums, changed the meaning and import of council housing. It changed from a place where people could recover a lost Englishness, and therefore places worthy of investment, to a place – like the slums – where those who were not ‘properly’ part of the social fabric were to go.

Allocations were at the heart of this problem. Official observers admitted that allocating council housing by constructing an intimate portrait of every family’s needs was breaking down

¹¹⁷ CHAC, *Council Housing: Purposes, Procedures and Priorities* (London: HMSO, 1969), 134.

¹¹⁸ Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration: Housing. Vol. 1. Session 1970-71 no.508-I, 2. See also Daniel, *Racial Discrimination*, 182-84; Elizabeth Burney and David Wainwright, *After Four Years: A Practical Guide to the Race Relations Act* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1972), 5, BL/W26-4298; Birmingham Community Relations Council, *Annual Report, 1979/80*, 23, BHM/BCC/MS 1952/1/6.

¹¹⁹ Select Committee: Housing. Vol 1., 13.

in the face of the changing shape of families, work, cities, preferences, and need.¹²⁰ The late-Victorian conception of an industrial, imperial working-class family, was unable to be adapted for a post-imperial, deindustrializing nation and it was not. In *Racial Disadvantage* Smith described PEP researchers' visits to several London borough council housing departments, and their conclusion that the allocation systems were "so complex that it must be virtually incomprehensible to all but amateur lawyers."¹²¹ Smith carefully did not accuse the staff of the London councils of direct and overt discrimination, but he consistently points out the ways in which the allocation systems work to harm all newcomers, especially minorities; the system as he described it is a Kafka-esque nightmare. In the section on citizenship and eligibility he notes that of the councils surveyed by his team, any applicant who was a British citizen within the terms of the Nationality Act, 1948, was eligible. But Pakistan left the Commonwealth in 1972, so people born in Pakistan who were not already council tenants lost the right to apply, even though they kept the right to stay in Britain and their British-born children, as British citizens, could apply once they were adults and satisfied the relevant allocation criteria. Quite apart from the complications facing Pakistani Britons, Smith reported that "uncertainty, doubt and confusion" attended the nationality question for New Commonwealth immigrants. If an applicant wrote 'Indian' or 'Jamaican' or 'Nigerian' instead of 'British' in the nationality section they would receive a notice saying they were ineligible to apply for a council house until they were naturalized, despite the fact that that was impossible: they had been born British subjects under the 1948 Act. "It was abundantly clear," from the interview that PEP undertook with the "good-natured" administrator of the waiting list, "that the authority had completely failed to convey to the staff who had to administer the rule exactly what the rule meant."¹²²

The people coming to council housing in the 1970s were well aware that council housing had not been made for people like them and of the stereotypes housing managers, social workers, and the public at large held about them. They refused to accept, however, that they were any less entitled than the whiter and more stable residents that had come before them to council housing that was made *for them*. *Solidarity North West*, an activist newsheet, published an exposé of Manchester slum clearance and rehousing programs in the late 1960s or early 1970s; the author quoted an "Irish building worker" who protested at a meeting of Moss Side residents, "The Town Hall is building stables for us on the moor and whipping us there."¹²³ Council tenants were resentful and angry at their poor treatment and lack of recourse.¹²⁴ Just as Britons of colour were concentrated in decaying twilight areas, they were also concentrated on the so-called 'worst' council estates, where no one wanted to live, further tightening the link in the popular imagination between Britons of colour, poor housing, and declining fortunes of council

¹²⁰ CHAC, *Council Housing: Purposes*, chs. 1-2; *Housing in Multi-Racial Areas*, 34-36, BL/OP-GPB/10017; Burney and Wainwright, *After Four Years*, 5, BL/W26-4298; Commission for Racial Equality, *Local Authorities and the Housing Implications of Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1980), 10-13, BL/BS.400/52.

¹²¹ Smith, *Racial Disadvantage*, 257; 256-58.

¹²² Smith, *Racial Disadvantage*, 254-55.

¹²³ Dick Sheenan, "Slum Clearance in Manchester," *Solidarity North West* 1 no. 2 [1969?]: 20, MRC/MSS.15X/1/285/1.

¹²⁴ Petra Griffiths, *Homes Fit for Heroes: A SHELTER Report on Council Housing* (London: Shelter, 1975), 62-67, BGI/SHELTER/4/5; Derek Brown, "Tenants planning rent strikes against new Act," *The Guardian* 24 August, 1972, p. 20; Minutes of Meeting Between Ferndale Area Residents' Association and Councillor Mike Drake, 27 August 1981, Lambeth Archives (hereafter LAM) IV/193/2.

housing.¹²⁵ “We have a right to live where we work and where we feel safe,” declared the Bengali Housing Action Group in a statement protesting the failure of Tower Hamlets Borough Council and the GLC to fulfill their statutory duties to house their residents appropriately. BHAG, which means both ‘tiger’ and ‘share’ in Bengali, was formed by Bangladeshi migrants to Tower Hamlets, east London, in 1975, as migrants found themselves choosing between squatting in derelict council flats or being ‘dispersed’ far from Spitalfields, the heart of the Bangladeshi community in Britain, onto all-white estates where they were frequently attacked by fellow residents. Contrary to press reports, BHAG said, “At no stage did we ask for a ‘ghetto’. Nor did we ask for ‘segregated slum blocks.’” Instead, they concluded, “We ask for your support in resisting any move – whether it be from within the community or from outside – which forces us to integrate with those sections of the white community who attack us.”¹²⁶

By the mid to late 1970s conditions in council housing had grown as bad as the slums they had been meant to replace, complete with the stereotypes about slum dwellers that the new council tenants had been unable to shake off. Many commentators pointed out that council estates, particularly housing that councils had bought in ‘twilight areas’ were for the least suitable council tenants.¹²⁷ These estates, activists claimed, were located, stigmatised, and underserved in such a way that residents were systematically shunted into poorer quality services – Bengali residents in Tower Hamlets were as angry about the poor quality schools and designation of many Bengali children as ‘educationally sub-normal’ as they were about the poor-quality housing the council offered them – and had to put up with shockingly bad states of repair, theft, vandalism, with no police support.¹²⁸ As early as 1962 sociologist Hilda Jennings was offering evidence that rehousing tenants moved to ‘Mossdene,’ a large suburban estate, from central Bristol were more likely to have ‘broken marriages’ and to engage in vandalism and

¹²⁵ Notting Hill Housing Trust, *Housing Policies for Colville Tavistock: A Preliminary Report to the Director of the Redevelopment and Steering Committee* (London: Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, 1972), LMA/GLC/AR/HOD/10/011; Hammersmith & Fulham Planning Research Group, *Housing Structure and Tenure* (London: Hammersmith & Fulham Borough Council, 1975), HFA/H331.83 HAM; John Parker and Keith Dugmore, *Colour and the Allocation of GLC Housing: The Report of the GLC Lettings Survey, 1974-75*. GLC Research Report no. 21 (London: Greater London Council, 1976), LMA/GLC/DG/PUB/01/101/0862; Commission for Racial Equality, *Local Authorities and the Housing Implications of Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1980), 11-13, BL/BS.400-52; Spitalfields Housing and Planning Rights Service, *Bengalis and Housing Allocation in E.1.*,” (London: SHAPRS, 1982), THM/LC1291/SHAPRS; Deborah Phillips, *What Price Equality? A Report on the Allocation of GLC Housing in Tower Hamlets*. GLC Housing & Policy Research Report no. 9 (London: Greater London Council, 1986), LMA/GLC/DG/PUB/01/201/1649.

¹²⁶ “Asians and Housing: A Bengali Housing Action Group Statement,” June 1978, IRR/01/04/04/01/07/006.

¹²⁷ Burney, *Housing on Trial*, 65; Davies, “Tenants of Indian and Pakistani Landlords,” 284-85; Solon Housing Association, “Louvaine Action Plan,” 1974, Wandsworth Heritage Service (hereafter WHS)/363.55.SOL; Runnymede Trust, *Race and Council Housing in London* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1975), Table 1, p. 5; Griffiths, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, ch. 1, BGI/SHELTER/4/5; “East End Housing Hustle,” *Race Today* 7, no. 8 (1975): 176-77; London Borough of Ealing Housing Committee, “Housing Conditions in Northcote Ward: Agenda Item 12,” 30 October 1978, 3, IRR/01/04/04/01/12/007; “Save Our Sites: A Report on the Need for New Houses in Spitalfields,” September 1979, THM/LC7670.; Spitalfields Housing and Planning Rights Service, “Bengalis and GLC Housing Allocation in E1,” (London: SHAPRS, 1982), THM/LC1291.

¹²⁸ Lionel Morrison, “Fair Housing for All,” *Race Today* (September 1970): 318-20; “Save Our Sites,” 6, THM/LC7670; SHAPRS, “Bengalis and GLC Housing,” THM/LC1291; Asian Resource Centre, *Progress Report 1979*, 9, IRR/01/04/04/01/07/007; Hammersmith & Fulham Council for Racial Equality, *A Place to Live: A Report on the Local Housing Situation* (London: Council for Racial Equality [1980]), 6, HFA/H331.83 HAM; Tottenham Borough Council, “Broadwater Farm Estate: Report on Maintenance and Allocations,” 1981, BGI/BG/P/4/4/1; Julian Ruddock, “Report on Newham CABX Service and Racism, Requested by Council in November 1985,” LMA/LMA/4462/P/01/039/F/002.

'hooliganism' in their new surroundings.¹²⁹ Council tenants on the Isle of Sheppey described the 'other end', whichever end that was, as 'a bad lot'; and both the Shelter survey, from 1975, and a study of estates around Leeds by Leeds Polytechnic Policy Research Unit in 1989 had numerous tenants complaining that it was 'those slum clearance tenants' rehoused over the last decade or so who had lowered the tone of 'nice' estates.¹³⁰ Throughout the 1970s a discourse of 'ghettos', 'dump estates', 'failed estates' and 'dumping grounds' ran through discussions of council estates, a far cry from the high hopes for council estates two decades earlier.¹³¹ Elsie Newman, a Londoner who had lived in the Roehampton Estate in south-west London since 1957 wrote a history of her time as a Roehampton resident for the Inner London Education Authority in 1980. After describing the many successful resident-led initiatives of her early years, like mother-and-baby social clubs and playgroups for older children, Roehampton had grown to be characterised by apathy and neglect, and felt "like a transit camp" because so many people had left and the few new arrivals never stayed long.¹³²

By 1975, Shelter, the nation's largest homelessness charity, was arguing that council tenants were "second-class citizens."¹³³ Their report, entitled *Homes Fit for Heroes*, in an ironic recapitulation of 1919, concluded that even apart from the extreme problems of neglect, stigma, and crime, *all* council tenants were a disfavoured and disadvantaged class:

It is often assumed that a Council tenancy is always a good deal and we can stop being concerned about people once they have a Council house. Yet Council tenants have fewer rights than any other group of householders. They have no security of tenure, and can only hand their tenure on to their children at the Council's discretion. They often have no choice as to where they are rehoused and can very rarely transfer to another house unless they can get another tenant to exchange with them. They frequently have to suffer a very inadequate repair system and are not informed of their legal rights to get repairs done through the courts. Usually they have no say in the external decoration of their houses or the layout of their gardens, and have to ask permission to do any internal alteration.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Jennings, *Societies in the Making*, 126-29. Jennings also points out that some tenants were rehoused from inter-war estates that also had a "bad" reputation; on this subject see Ben Jones, "Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: the Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-Twentieth Century England," *Twentieth Century British History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 510-539.

¹³⁰ Dennis, *People and Planning*, 183-84; Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me*, 180-81; Griffiths, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, 10, BGI/SHELTER/4/5; Sean Brady, Mike Campbell, Janie Percy-Smith, Brendan Sheehan, "Leeds City Council's Housing Service: A Survey of Tenants' Attitudes by the Policy Research Unit, Leeds Polytechnic," Leeds: Leeds City Council Department of Housing and Environmental Health, 1989, BL/q89/23565.

¹³¹ Griffiths, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, 62-63, BGI/SHELTER/4/5; Pearl Jephcott, *Homes in High Flats*, 130-31; John Windsor, "Pavilioned in Squalor," *The Guardian* 15 October 1971, p. 13; Robert Waterhouse, "'It's not much of a site, that's why they gave it to us,'" *The Guardian* 10 July 1978;

¹³² Elsie Newman, *Getting Roehampton on the Map: A Personal View of 23 Years on the Alton Estate* (London: Roehampton Community Council, 1980), 4-5, WHS/363.585.NEWM.

¹³³ Griffiths, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, 62, BGI/SHELTER/4/5

¹³⁴ Griffiths, *Homes Fit for Heroes*, 1, BGI/SHELTER/4/5.

That same year the *Race Today* collective argued that the GLC was “the biggest slum landlord in London.”¹³⁵

Conclusion: The Tensions of Need

Housing in England on the eve of privatization under Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives in 1980 was something of a paradox. On the one hand, almost a third of all households were council tenants (31.7%) and a clear majority (57.2%) were owner-occupiers. Only 11% of households rented privately.¹³⁶ This was an astounding reversal over the hundred years since 1880, when 90% of Britons were private renters, and a thoroughgoing social change.¹³⁷ On the other, council housing was becoming a byword for poverty, dysfunction and marginalization, all understood in highly racialized and gendered ways, just as the slums that council housing had been supposed to replace had been. Further, the rediscovery of poverty had made it clear that forms of poverty that had existed in Britain for centuries not only had not been eliminated by the economic growth and redistribution of the welfare state, but that they were appearing in new places, all tied to the shifts precipitated by decolonization and deindustrialization. Ironically, the thing that persisted best was the knowledge production regime and culture of surveillance and examination of those exotic beings, no longer slum dwellers but instead, estate residents.

In the law and practice of public housing in postwar Britain we see a conjunction of three things: a racialized understanding of certain kinds of urban dwellers that had had a long influence on housing policy; an expansion of council housing that promised integration but only on particular terms; and a politics of redevelopment, rehabilitation and modernization that called for the elimination of that urban underclass and the places – the slums – in which they lived. These three things could not exist together in the legal and political space that was the council estate and the slide of council housing down the list of desirable residences until it became what political scientists call ‘residualized’ – the choice of last resort – began as the people who had been painted as unstable threats to the nation entered the spaces that had been held up as redemptive.

¹³⁵ “East End Housing Campaign,” *Race Today* 7 no. 12 (December 1975), 268-69. SHAC had similar criticisms of both the local authorities and the central government in Scotland, see *Scotland’s Older Houses*, 24-26.

¹³⁶ English Housing Survey data on tenure trends and cross tenure: Table FT1101 (S101): Trends in Tenure, accessed 29 April 2024 <

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64af3084c033c1000d806207/FT1101_Trends_in_tenure_58.ods >

¹³⁷ Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 282-83.

Epilogue & Conclusion

An Equality of Disadvantage: Council Housing and Neoliberal Britain, 1974-2017

In 2000 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissioned an update of the Index of Local Deprivation from scholars at the University of Oxford. The team produced the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 (IMD2000) Report. Income, employment, health, education, access to services and child poverty were assessed, weighted, and combined to give each ward in England an Index of Multiple Deprivation score. All wards in England were ranked from 1, the most deprived, to 8,414, the least. The five most deprived wards in England were Benchill, Speke, Thorntree, Everton, and Pallister. Benchill is in the Wythenshawe estate outside Manchester; Speke, we have encountered before, the postwar estate outside Liverpool; Everton is in inner-city Liverpool; and Thorntree and Pallister are council estates in Middlesbrough, former coal-and-steel port of north Yorkshire.¹ Deprivation had been transferred from the old slums of the industrial towns to the council estates meant to be the future of the imperial industrial social democracy, even as the poverty of historical slum districts, like Everton, or Tower Hamlets, had *not* been erased. Since 2000 the IMD has been recalculated every four years, most recently in 2019; similar reports have also been produced for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.² Despite variations in methodology the pattern observed in the 2000 findings for England has held over time and across the island. The least deprived areas of England remain the Home Counties ringing London, together with the surrounds of Oxford and Cambridge, the traditional seats of power and privilege, and these are also districts with some of the lowest rates of social renting.³ The most deprived areas in Britain are districts dominated by social housing, both suburban estates and inner-city tower blocks. This holds true in London, in Tower Hamlets and the Notting Dale ward, home of Grenfell, North Kensington, in Wales, in the ‘overspill’ estates outside Glasgow, and in the great suburban estates outside industrial towns, once imagined as show-places of industrial and imperial Britain.⁴

¹ Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions, “Indices of Deprivation 2000: Ward Indices.” Archived by the National Archives, “Indices of Deprivation 2000,” 7 April, 2010, accessed 23 May, 2024 < <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100407204456/http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/general-content/communities/indicesofdeprivation/indicesofdeprivation/>>; Middlesbrough Council, “Brambles and Thorntree 2019: Ward Report,” and “Berwick Hills and Pallister: Ward Report,” accessed 24 May, 2024 < <https://middlesbrough-council-middlesbrough.opendata.arcgis.com/documents/Middlesbrough::brambles-and-thorntree-ward-report-2019-/about>> and < <https://middlesbrough-council-middlesbrough.opendata.arcgis.com/documents/Middlesbrough::berwick-hills-and-pallister-ward-report-2019-/about>>.

² Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, “Indices Future: Updating the English Indices of Deprivation (IoD) – consultation,” 22 December 2022, accessed 9 June 2024, < <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/indices-futures-updating-the-english-indices-of-deprivation-iod-consultation/indices-futures-updating-the-english-indices-of-deprivation-iod-consultation>>.

³ *English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019*: File 1: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019), 26 September 2019, accessed 9 June, 2024 < <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>> and Office of National Statistics, “Housing: England and Wales: Census 2021,” 5 January, 2023, accessed 13 July 2024, < <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021#tenure>>.

⁴ *English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019*: File 1: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019), accessed 9 June, 2024 < <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>>; StatsWales, “Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 by rank, decile and quintile, Lower-layer Super Output Area,” 27 November, 2019, accessed 13 July, 2024 < <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-2019/welshindexofmultipledeprivation2019-by-rank-decileandquintile-lowerlayersuperoutputarea>>; Government of Scotland, “Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 data zones,” 28 January 2020, accessed 13 July 2024, < <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020v2-data-zone-look-up/>>; Office

Council housing has thus become the home of the most deprived people in Britain. It has become a ‘residual’ public service, that is, “only a ‘safety net’ for those who for reasons of poverty, age or infirmity cannot obtain suitable accommodation in the private sector.”⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, council housing’s journey to the least desirable option began in the mid-1960s, as people who were not the ‘English social democrat’ began to gain access to council housing through slum clearance and homelessness rehousing programs. Instead of greater investment devoted to helping these people receive the benefits council housing was supposed to convey, concern grew about spiralling costs, premature decay of newly-built estates, especially tower blocks, and, instead of becoming cohesive communities, frequent reports of crime, disorderly conduct, and racial harassment on council estates.⁶

This dissertation has shown how a consensus that council housing should create English citizens and workers, offering them a way to participate as equals in British democracy arose after the First World War and was put into practice after the Second. Built as it was on racialized, classed, and gendered ideals derived from Britain’s imperial ambitions, this consensus faltered in the face of migration and deindustrialization that made the working classes less white, less homogenous, and removed the jobs in manufacturing and mining on which the prosperity of Britain’s empire had been based. The postwar attempt to make council housing, and its residents, equal had already come under pressure from the mid-1960s. Between 1974 and 1980 the end of that consensus and the rise of the new one – residual council housing – was signalled by four changes to the law of council housing: ending large-scale slum clearance; the provision of government grants to housing associations; making local authorities responsible for housing those made homeless; and Right-to-Buy.⁷ The first was ending slum clearance in the Housing Act, 1974. As discussed in chapters one and two, slum clearance by local authorities was the foundation of housing law. It was designed to control working-class families and promote the reproduction of racially healthy and culturally assimilated imperial subjects, but, as we saw in chapters three and four, its goal *was* integration of a sort. The 1974 Act replaced local authorities’ powers of large-scale clearance with the ability to declare ‘Housing Action Areas.’ In areas named as such

of National Statistics, “Housing: England and Wales: Census 2021,” accessed 13 July 2024, <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021#tenure>>; Office of National Statistics, “Subnational estimates of dwelling by tenure, England,” 27 February, 2023, accessed 13 July, 2024, <

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/subnationaldwellingstockbytenureestimates>>; Government of Scotland, “Scottish Household Survey: Local Authority Tables,” 8 October 2018, accessed 13 July, 2024 < <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-local-authority-tables/>>.

⁵ Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, *Housing Policy and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 174. Social scientists have observed the same process occurring across the developed world, including post-Communist eastern Europe, and not only in housing but other expensive, large-scale welfare programs too. However, use of the term ‘residualization’ itself is largely confined to European social scientists studying public housing in Europe, and to Australian discussions of public education. See Jen Pearce and Jim Vine, “Quantifying residualisation: the changing nature of social housing in the UK,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 29 (2014): 657; Stefan Angel, “Housing regimes and residualization of the subsidized rental sector in Europe 2005-2016,” *Housing Studies* 38, no. 5 (2023): 881-901; Ida Borg, “Universalism lost? The magnitude and spatial pattern of residualisation in the public housing sector in Sweden, 1993–2012,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 34 (2019):405–424.

⁶ London Race and Housing Forum, *Racial Harassment on Local Authority Housing Estates* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1981), IRR/01/04/04/01/11/01/10; Julian Ruddock, “Report on Newham CABX Service and Racism, Requested by Council in November 1985,” LMA/LMA/4462/P/01/039/F/002; Shabna Begum, *From Sylhet to Spitalfields: Bengali Squatters in 1970s London* (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2023), ch. 4.

⁷ Housing Act, 1974; Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977; Housing Act, 1980. See also Aled Davies, “‘Right to Buy’: The Development of a Conservative Housing Policy, 1945-1980,” *Contemporary British History* 27, no. 4 (2013): 421-44.

landlords and residents would be offered grants to implement the repairs required to bring their properties up to legal fitness.⁸ This was a retreat from the idea that it was worthwhile or possible to undertake large-scale projects to promote social integration.

The second major change to housing law, also contained in the 1974 Act, was making charitable non-profit companies, housing associations, functionally equivalent to local authorities as providers of housing for those in need. When sponsoring the Bill in Parliament, the Secretary of State for the Environment Anthony Crossland stated, “Housing Associations can and will have a growing role in supporting local authorities, particularly in meeting special need in the worst areas of housing stress.”⁹ For the first time, housing associations could apply to the Secretary of State for grants, i.e. money that did not have to be repaid, that would cover the entire net cost of their projects, from acquiring land to building housing.¹⁰ To retain their charitable status housing associations had to remain not-for-profit and they had to deliver on their “social purpose” of providing housing for people with low incomes or “essential supported and specialist housing” for people with special needs, ranging from the elderly to refugees to formerly incarcerated people.¹¹ After 1974, housing associations grew and grew as providers of housing to the needy, to the point where in England today, more people live in housing association housing than council housing.¹²

If the Housing Act, 1974, was the end of the consensus that council housing and slum clearance should be a force for integration, however classed, racialized, and gendered, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977 was the moment when the information-gathering and knowledge-production infrastructure that had developed for, with, and through housing law was finally codified throughout the island of Britain, for the Act covered England, Wales and Scotland.¹³ The categories of housing need worked out so painstakingly, and applied so carefully by local authorities became law, when before they had been recommendations; homelessness itself became a legal category for the first time since the Tudor poor laws had defined a vagrant as a ‘masterless man’ (feminists pointed out that the homeless person was still construed as a man).¹⁴ Section three of the Act, described by the sponsoring MP as the “true heart of the bill,” required local authorities to make inquiries about exactly how that

⁸ These improvement grants were not new, having been introduced in the 1920s, but they had never been particularly successful. D. V. Donnison, *The Government of Housing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 337-38.

⁹ 873 H. C. Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1974) col. 48.

¹⁰ Housing Act 1974, c. 44, Part III.

¹¹ National Housing Federation, “What housing associations do,” 2024, accessed 2 July 2024, <https://www.housing.org.uk/about-housing-associations/what-housing-associations-do/#:~:text=Housing%20associations%20are%20not%2Dfor,delivering%20on%20their%20social%20purpose.> Observers at the time recognized what increasing the role of housing associations would mean for council housing, see Ruth Issacharoff, “The Limitations of London Housing Associations,” *Race Today* (September 1972): 294-96.

¹² Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, *English Housing Survey: Social Rented Sector, 2020-21*.

¹³ Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, c.48, s.1(a)(i). For a functionalist account of the origins of the 1977 Act see Jamie Harding, *Post-War Homelessness Policy in the UK: Making and Implementation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 92-98. Rates of homelessness increased alarmingly over the 1970s, especially in London, and so, with the backing of several important charities, including CPAG and Shelter, both of which arose out of the ‘rediscovery of poverty’ discussed in the previous chapter, Liberal MP Stephen Ross introduced a Private Member’s Bill during the Callaghan Labour government’s term.

¹⁴ A homeless person was one who had no accommodation or could not secure entry to his accommodation if entry would make him liable to violence or threats of violence or was likely to enter into this state within twenty-eight days; ‘accommodation’ included caravans and houseboats. See Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, c.48, s.1; Sophie Watson and Helen Austerberry, *Housing and Homelessness: A Feminist Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 11-13; Juliet Gosling, “Women Without Homes,” *Spare Rib* no. 191 (June 1988): 40-43; A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985).

person satisfied the raced, classed, and gendered forms of need that had been used by the state to allocate council housing. Local authorities had to ascertain that the person homeless or at immediate risk of such was not “intentionally homeless” and if they fell into one of four ‘priority’ categories of need. If they did, they were obliged to secure them accommodation.¹⁵ If they did not, the local authority was only obliged to house the homeless person if they or someone reasonably expected to reside with them had a “local connection;” otherwise they simply had to notify the local authority with which the homeless person *did* have a local connection. The ‘local connection’ requirement was analogous to the residential qualifications devised to maintain the white Englishness of the new estates.

The priority categories of need, the exceptions to the local connection requirement, are also familiar. They are the codification in the law of England and Wales of the kinds of need that merited council housing: those with dependent children; those made homeless as a result of disaster; those vulnerable on account of old age, mental illness, physical disability, or any other “special reason”; and pregnant women.¹⁶ This reversed the logic of slum clearance. Then it was about moving families who were not English social democrats into spaces that would train them to be so. Now, as the MP who sponsored the Bill said, it was about finding a space, for those who “rather regrettably” had gone through a “break-up of family life.”¹⁷

The compact around council housing as the home of the English social democrat broke down in the 1970s. What was to replace it was answered in the Conservative Party’s *General Election Manifesto* for 1979. It was the property-owner, responsible for themselves and their family alone. Calling for the creation of “a property-owning democracy” through home ownership the Conservative party vowed to give settled council tenants and new town residents the “legal right to buy their homes” and to ‘revive’ the private rented sector by curbing protected tenancies.¹⁸

The Manifesto made explicit the residualization of council housing and welfare services. The fourth of the ‘five tasks’ outlined by Margaret Thatcher in the Preface was:

To support family life, by helping people become home-owners, raising the standards of their children’s education, and concentrating welfare services on the effective support of the old, the sick, the disabled and those who are in real need.¹⁹

Council housing was now only for those who could not provide the ‘home of their own’ for their family, and local authorities found the latitude of their authority diminished sharply. After Right-to-Buy they were obliged to sell to any tenant who met the qualifying criteria when they applied to buy their home, and staffers in the Department of the Environment prepared strategies to deal with “reluctant,” “cunning” or “martyr” local authorities who might thwart Right-to-Buy.²⁰ As well as *who* could buy, the price at which the home could be sold was rigidly controlled. Council dwellings were to be sold at a price “which, at that time,

¹⁵ 926 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th series) (1977) c. 903; Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, c.48 ss. 2-3; s.5(1)(a)(i); ss.5-6.

¹⁶ Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, c.48, s.2(1)a-c, s.2(2).

¹⁷ 926 H.C. Parl. Deb. (5th series) (1977) c897.

¹⁸ Matthew Francis, “‘A Crusade to Enfranchise the Many’: Thatcherism and the ‘Property-Owning Democracy,’” *Twentieth Century British History* 23, no. 2 (2012): 275-97; Brian Lund, *Housing Politics in the United Kingdom: Power, Planning and Protest* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2016), ch. 5.

¹⁹ Conservative Party, *General Election Manifesto*, 11 April 1979 ch. 1, from the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, accessed 3 July 2024, < <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110858>>.

²⁰ Housing Act, 1980 s.5(1-3); W. Woof, minute to F. N. Golding, “Right to Buy: Administrative Procedures: Reluctant LA’s,” 27 September, 1979, TNA/HLG 118/3182.

it would realise if sold on the open market by a willing vendor,” *and* a graduated discount which began at 33 percent and was capped at 50 percent because of the security of tenure council tenants enjoyed.²¹ In the fifteen years between 1980 and 1996 more than two million people bought their homes.

Once dwellings were sold, the proceeds did not go back to the local authority; they went to the Treasury. Local authorities still receive rates (now Council Tax) on ex-council dwellings but proceeds of the sales went to the central government. Capital receipts from council house sales were calculated to *average* more than £1 billion every year between 1981 and 2007.²² Homes bought under Right-to-Buy were “disproportionately” larger houses with gardens, rather than flats; one researcher estimated that by 1991 almost half (44%) of council *houses* had been sold, compared with 18% of smaller terrace houses and 3% of flats.²³ Lastly, once a council dwelling was sold to its owner it became identical to any other privately-owned residence. In the first eight years of Right-to-Buy 24% of council housing stock in the South-East, outside London, was sold, and 14% *in* London, compared to 9% and 12% respectively in Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West and the West Midlands.²⁴ As Alan Murie put it, “The impact of the Right to Buy has been to increase the relative concentration of rented housing in London and to increase the contrast between the tenure structure in London and the South East.”²⁵ Exchequer subsidies for new and existing council housing were reduced or eliminated. Some of that funding was redirected to housing associations but most of it was not.²⁶ In 2004, the number of households in England renting privately surpassed the number of council renters for the first time since 1961; in 2007 housing association renters did too. Council housing had indeed become the home of small and distinct minority of the population. The Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, John Patten, reflected on his government’s actions in 1986, “We have irreversibly changed the landscape of housing policy. There is no turning back.”²⁷

Contribution and Directions for Future Research

Council housing tells a story of imperial and post-imperial Britain’s political economy. It highlights the importance of a very particular family form to state formation in modern Britain and its imperial genealogy because council housing was a technology developed to make and manage that family. Where council housing’s expansion was predicated on finding that family through technocratic knowledge production, Right-to-Buy gave that power to the market. However, ironically, the power and the funding that the Housing Act, 1974 gave to housing associations, *and* the legacy of discrimination that ensured that Britons of colour were more likely to live on the least popular, most dilapidated council estates, and therefore did not take up Right-to-Buy as much as their white peers did, produced an impressive growth of Black- and Asian-led housing associations.²⁸ Rightfully hailed as a success story of ethnic-minority Britons building powerful networks of community support and solidarity, the story is complicated by the ways in which, now, several generations of Britons of colour have been treated as second-class citizens, first left

²¹ Housing Act, 1980, c. 51, ss.6-7; Conservative Party, *Manifesto*, ch. 5.

²² Alan Murie, *The Right to Buy? Selling Off Public and Social Housing* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2016), 82.

²³ Murie *Right to Buy?* 70-71.

²⁴ Murie, *Right to Buy?* 74.

²⁵ Murie, *Right to Buy?* 75.

²⁶ David Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Longman, 1991), 203.

²⁷ H. C. Parl. Deb. (6th ser.) (1986) vol. 91, col. 153.

²⁸ Harris Beider, *Race, Housing and Community: Perspectives on Policy and Practice* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), ch. 4.

out of council housing, left with it only when it became the residual option. The success of Black- and Asian-led housing associations in catering for their communities' own needs shows how imperial legacies influence every aspect of life in modern Britain, *and* demonstrate the determination of Britons of colour to resist them and to work within and around them to offer an example of what a post-imperial Britain could look like.²⁹ The importance of the non-profit sector to those who were never well-served by the public sector is a complicated story that historians have not yet addressed.

This dissertation has used empire as a heuristic to understand state formation and politics in modern Britain. In doing so it tells a story of an inquisitive state, one deeply interested in the lives of its subjects, and accordingly committed to accumulating information about them, and putting it to work.³⁰ It is in this work that we see how intensely the modern British state has been interested in the intimate lives of its subjects, and the story of council housing, too, shows how much influence and power over people's lives the state can aggregate to itself. When considered as part of the history of empire, this suggests how state power makes itself felt in a huge range of activity, as we recall CHAC's earnest deliberations over the home décor choices of council tenants in Bootle, and why, a very particular kind of social reproduction. In Britain's case too, this was a way that empire made itself felt in the metropole. The kinds of information the state gathered, the way it gathered them, the interpretations its agents made, and the uses they were put to all bear a *family* resemblance to similar forms of intimate governance employed in the colonies. In the post-colonial world today when the parliamentary and legal system are two of the most enduring legacies of the British Empire outside Britain, this dissertation shows this related legacy within.

This dissertation is in the service of understanding the globalized world we live in today. Council housing – which has seemed so quintessentially domestic – shows that there is not anything ever really *domestic* and instead the outside world is where we least expect it. From council housing's role in empire-building to ex-council housing's appearance in the global London property market, whether as an investment for multi-national property companies or as a home, as Grenfell Tower was, for the global working class that supports the professions, council housing has always been *distinctive* but it has never been isolated or divorced from the wider world.

²⁹ See e.g. *Black Housing* industry magazine, held by the George Padmore Institute, London; Nirmala Rao, *Black Women in Public Housing* (London: Black Women in Housing Group, 1990), WHS/363.59.RAO; Beider, *Race, Housing and Community*, ch. 6; Neil Stott and Michelle Fava, "Challenging Racialized Institutions: A History of Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Associations in England between 1948 and 2018," *Journal of Management History* 26 no. 3 (2020): 315-33.

³⁰ David Vincent, *I Hope I Don't Intrude: Privacy and Its Dilemmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 232-33; Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), ch. 3; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), ch. 6.

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Appendix I

Table of Statutes

Acts discussed in detail are *italicised*.

Housing Acts

Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890

Housing and Town Planning Act 1909

Housing, Town Planning &c. Act 1919

Housing Act 1930

Housing Act 1935

Housing Act 1936

Housing Act 1949

Housing Repairs and Rents Act 1954

Housing (Subsidies) Act, 1956

Housing Act 1957

Housing Act 1961

Housing Act 1964

Housing Act 1974

Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977

Housing Act 1980

Housing Act 1986

Other Relevant Acts

Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Act 1868

Artizans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Acts 1875-1884

Settled Land Act 1890

Ministry of Health Act 1919

Town and Country Planning Act 1947

National Assistance Act 1948