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HOUSING POLICY AND URBAN TRADE UNIONISM:

THE GRANDS ENSEMBLES OF PARIS

by Manuel Castells

Introduction

The Rise and Fall of the Grands Ensembles

Paris is not Paris anymore. Less than 16% of the 9,400,000 Parisians live within the administrative limits of the city. For the others, their home is the "banlieue," the ring of suburbs built around the historic city during the accelerated metropolitan growth of the post-1945 period.¹ The suburban landscape is dominated by the "grands ensembles," an image as parisian as the Eiffel Tower since the 1960s. The "Grand Ensemble" is the ultimate expression of socialized housing production under state initiative.² It is a large, very dense high-rise housing estate, generally built in the middle of nowhere (that is, cheap agricultural land), connected to Paris by train and road, so that its 20,000-60,000 dwellers can commute every day either to Paris or to some industrial location in the surrounding periphery. The physical shape and the management system of the "grands ensembles" seem to fit almost too well into the theoretical model that sees housing as a mean of reproduction of labor power.³ The French government, under a variety of procedures which we will examine, provided public housing, at the lowest possible cost, for a population struck by a housing crisis beyond the limits of what the Fourth Republic, under the influence of powerful left-wing parties, could actually bear.⁴ In 1954, almost 9% of residents of the Paris Metropolitan Area did not have any regular home (in

French statistical terms they lived in "logements de fortune"). The proportion jumped to 14.5% for blue-collar workers. Besides, some 17% of the total population were forced to share a flat with another family; 15% of the housing units were overcrowded; 18% did not have a kitchen; and 54.5% did not have a water-closet inside the flat!⁵ Yet, Paris was the most advantageous location for industrial firms in search for skilled workers and a large market. As a result, people from all over France emigrated to Paris, looking for a job.⁶ But the housing demand was not met by housing supply.⁷ In the city of Paris, the 1948 Rent Control Law discouraged investment and sharply reduced rotation of occupancy.⁸ In the metropolitan area, the income levels of the arriving workers could not meet the level of rents or prices required by new construction operating under conditions of a tight and speculative land market.⁹ Industrialists foresaw the problem and feared the impact upon wage demands.¹⁰ The Labor Unions and the Communist Party pushed for low-rent public housing. A Christian movement was organized around "l' Abbé Pierre" to defend the most desperate cases. Popular mobilizations developed and some squatting took place.¹¹ The Government responded with a major reform in housing policy: the "Plan Caurant," in 1953.¹² Three measures appeared to be the core of a new orientation toward housing: all private businesses were required to contribute 1% of the wages they were paying to a special public-housing fund; a series of legal regulations gave the government, and the municipalities, extensive powers of eminent domain over development land; and a new major para-public developer, the SCIC,¹³ was enacted to build public housing, mainly on the basis of the savings deposited in the government-run "Post-office's savings," the first collector of popular savings in France. The need for housing was so evident, the pressure for it so compelling, that the SCIC

started to work immediately, trying to build as quickly as possible, and as much as possible. Thus, cheap land was acquired, land whose lack of equipment, isolation, and distance from Paris made it unattractive to any private developer. Density was very high, so that the impact of ground rent on the total cost of housing would be reduced.¹⁴ And the quality of construction was set at the lowest level minimizing the cost, maximizing the number of units, and reminding everybody of the welfare nature of the construction. Such an implicit punishment was accentuated in the aesthetics of the "grands ensembles," particularly in those of the first generation (1955-1963). Under the rationale of standardizing construction in order to industrialize the building sector, uniform high-rise buildings in parallel rows were planted in a grid pattern open to the north wind and overwhelmed by the gray skies over the parisian plain. Furthermore, if a city is something more than an agglomeration of housing units, the "grands ensembles" were not a city until many years later: they did not have, at their start, basic urban equipment such as health services, day-care centers, enough schools, cultural facilities, retail stores, or sufficient public transportation.¹⁵ If the French invented the expression of the "right to the city,"¹⁶ it is likely that such an imaginative statement was stimulated by the contrast between one of the richest urban cultures in the world, along the banks of the Seine, and the actual experience of reducing urban settlement to a state-provided concrete dormitory.

The impact on public opinion of the deteriorated way of life symbolically expressed by the "grands ensembles" became considerably bigger than anticipated. Movies, songs, books, and jokes stigmatized the experience. A major reason might have been the fact that, against the left-wing ideological representation prevailing in France, the grands ensembles were not

a working-class settlement. The classical demographic study by Paul Clerc¹⁷ on the social structure of the grands ensembles discovered that the profile of their residents was very similar to the one for the corresponding metropolitan area: manual workers, clerks, and low-level professionals shared the same residential space. The only substantial differences in relationship to the central city was the higher proportion of young couples with infants, and the over-representation of middle-level technicians among the grands ensembles' residents. So, while the new urban areas were seen by the Left, and probably by the Government, as the new strongholds of the working-class, they were in fact the spatial setting of the new generation of parisiens, largely dominated by a new middle-class growing under the impulse of the service economy.¹⁸

In spite of all the criticisms the grands ensembles mushroomed over the parisian geography for almost twenty years. They were the state's response to housing demands. They overwhelmed the horizon, submerging the romantic images of Paris, and forging a new tough generation of metropolitan dwellers. Then, one day of the Spring 1973, like the dinosaurs, they suddenly disappeared. To be precise, their trace still remains on the parisian soil: the buildings are there, the people are there, and the housing bureaucracy is there. But they are simple remnants. Not a simple grand ensemble will be built anymore. They will not be replaced in their process of decay. The concept has disappeared. And, as with the dinosaurs, it was a sudden extinction that, at first sight, remains a mystery. To be sure, French historians, armed with Cartesianism, will have a definite explanation: the "Circulaire Guichard" of April 1973. As usual, French history will be considered to change by decree, according to some government's initiative. It is true that the decision of M. Guichard, Minister of

Equipment, to forbid the construction of any residential ensemble larger than 2,000 units, signaled the death of the urban formula that had characterized the French metropolitan suburbs for many years. Yet, such a dramatic shift in housing policy was itself the expression of deeper and more meaningful social contradictions. The political setbacks of the Gaullist coalition in the March 1973 elections (particularly serious in the grands ensembles) as well as generally hostile public opinion, led to a major rectification in public policy that actually modified the French metropolitan forms.¹⁹ It is our hypothesis that such social process, and their policy outcomes were largely determined by the urban protest movements that took place in the parisian Grands Ensembles during the 1960s and early 1970s. To test such a hypothesis on the reciprocal relationship between housing policy and urban movements, we carefully studied the first and the last "Grands Ensembles." The first: Sarcelles, built between 1957 and 1974, and source of all kind of images, analyses, and myths, to the point that a word was invented in French to mean the psychological illness associated to urban alienation: the "sarcellitis." The last: the Val d'Yerres, built between 1966 and 1974, in a desperate attempt of the public developer (the SCIC) to respond to social criticism by a new form of large housing estate displaying the virtues of environmental quality and intense human interaction. In both cases, a very active tenants' and residents' movement developed, challenging housing policies and life styles. In both cases we investigated the process of revolt in detail, through two years of field work research by a team of four full-time researchers, according to procedures described and justified in the Methodological Appendix. The result is an attempt to understand how the socialization of the city leads to urban struggles aimed at the state, the manager of the urban process.

And the research question we will try to answer is how a new housing policy gave birth to a new form of urban trade-unionism, that in return, undermined the policy itself.

2. The Emergence of Urban Trade-Unionism: Sarcelles

Sarcelles was the first "Grand Ensemble" built in the Paris metropolitan area, and still remains in the collective memory of parisians as the symbol of this specific urban form. It was also the first community to experience the development of a large resident mobilization to improve housing and living conditions: the observation of such a process provides the occasion to analyze the sources, limits, and outcomes of what, at first sight, appears to be the mainstream of urban demand movements in Western Europe, that is, tenants' unions in public housing.²⁰ It was also in Sarcelles that, for the first time, the discontent of dwellers concentrated in these newly built suburban dormitories resulted in a vote for a communist-dominated local government which has persisted since the municipal elections of 1965. Thus, our analysis will pay special attention to the complex interplay between urban movements and local politics, whose dynamics accounts for the evolution of urban policies in the "Grands Ensembles."

The construction of the "grand ensemble" started in 1954, in the territory of a small rural village, Sarcelles, 15 kms. north of Paris, with a population of around 1,500.²¹ Originally intended to receive 1,000 housing units, at its completion in 1974, Sarcelles contained over 13,000 units, with a population of around 60,000 people. The long span of time of its construction was because it was not planned as a unit, but expanded when necessary as a response to the growing housing crisis. Table 1 clearly shows that the first residents of Sarcelles moved there to escape the

unbearable housing conditions in Paris, with the exception of a few (about 4% of the residents in 1962) former French residents of Algeria, fleeing the country after its independence.

TABLE 1:

Reason for Leaving Former Residence for a Representative Sample of
Dwellers of the Grand Ensemble of Sarcelles in 1962

N = 4,002

Reason	% of Total Sample
Overcrowded or dilapidated housing	43.0
Living in furnished hotels	14.0
Living with other families	12.5
Eviction	8.7
Refugee from Northern Africa	4.2
Being closer (in Sarcelles) to work place	4.3
Rent paid was too high	0.6
Provisional barracks	0.5
Other motives (including job transfer from another city)	12.1

Source: SCIC, Etude Statistique de l'Ensemble de Sarcelles, October 1962.

Built, developed, and administered by the same para-public institution, the SCIC, Sarcelles actually combined three different types of housing, according to the evolution of French housing policy in three different periods. From 1954 to 1960, five neighborhoods were built, named, with an immutable bureaucratic logic: Sarcelles-I, Sarcelles-II, Sarcelles-III,

Sarcelles-IV and Sarcelles-V. They were basically all low-rent public housing units of the HLM* type aimed at a broad range of social situations, though with a predominance of blue-collar and clerical workers. Between 1960 and 1966, the improvement of economic conditions in France, along with the political hegemony of the right-wing Gaullist party, allowed the SCIC enough room to try to make some profitable housing investments raising the level of rents and improving the quality of the habitations: then, they built Sarcelles VI and VII. The result was an upgrading of Sarcelles social status, with fewer blue-collar workers and an increasing proportion of middle-managers and technicians. Then, in the period 1966-74, the attempt to attract to Sarcelles a more sophisticated type of residents, led to a policy of low-interest loans for homeownership. The last neighborhoods built in the "grand ensemble," Sarcelles VIII-XI, were predominantly condominiums for middle-class families. In 1974 almost one-third of the residents were homeowners. Table 2 shows the evolution of the social structure of the population for each area, as a consequence of the three subsequent housing policies underlying the construction of Sarcelles: (a) the basic aim of responding to the housing crisis that was present, though with a changing emphasis, throughout the twenty years period; (b) the effort to introduce private profitable investment in the public-housing sector; and (c) the attempt to break through the image of public rental housing by using public resources and authority to open a new homeownership market for the middle-class.

The development of residents' mobilization over housing demands went

*HLM: Habitation Loyer Modere: French Public Housing low-income units.

TABLE 2

Evolution of Social Composition of Sarcelles for
Each Neighborhood, 1962 and 1968:
Percent on the Total Population Living in Each Neighborhood,
Selected Categories

Occupational Category	Year	Sarcelles I	Sarcelles II	Sarcelles III	Sarcelles IV	Sarcelles V	Sarcelles VI-VII	Sarcelles VIII
Professionals and Managers	1962	7.0	6.7	5.6	6.4	5.0	--	--
	1968	5.7	4.3	5.0	5.0	7.8	2.0	20.7
Middle-Management and Technicians	1962	15.0	19.3	15.4	18.1	20.4	--	--
	1968	14.9	15.3	17.1	16.7	19.0	27.5	29.5
Clerks	1962	28.0	30.1	26.4	24.6	37.0	--	--
	1968	28.2	33.6	30.9	31.8	36.4	36.5	25.4
Manual Workers	1962	41.7	31.5	41.0	40.4	29.1	--	--
	1968	42.0	34.4	35.7	33.6	26.4	16.5	16.0

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Source: INSEE Census, 1962, 1968.

along in a parallel way, with the construction of Sarcelles. It took different forms and reached different levels of intensity. It was more active and less institutionalized in the first period, although more political and

somewhat more effective in terms of its urban impact in the late stages of the city's expansion. It is this emergence of an urban movement, and its contradictory relationship with the political system, that are actually the focus of our analysis in this particular case study.

Two major factors seem to have been at the origin of urban mobilization. On the one hand, the highly collective character of the production and management of the city: the SCIC was the developer, the landlord, the manager, for every building in the entire city, as well as the responsible institution for the production and delivery of all essential urban equipment. While people in Paris could hardly react collectively against their bad housing conditions, forced with a fragmented constellation of small landlords, once in Sarcelles everybody was confronting the same condition and had to deal with the same bureaucratic partner. The socialization of urban environment created the conditions for the discovery of a commonality of interests. Yet a second important element must be taken into consideration: the harshness of the living conditions of Sarcelles' first pioneers. Though their housing situation dramatically improved in relationship to what they had experienced in Paris, they were forced to live in the midst of a construction site, with no social or commercial equipment, poor transportation, and total absence of urban life. The studies on the social relationships in Sarcelles during the late 1950s and early 1960s show a dramatic decrease in the extension and richness of social networks and human interaction in comparison with the residents' former experience.²² The isolation was specially acute for women, many of whom had to give up their parisian jobs to take care of children, while also losing their contacts with friends, family, and neighbors, previously existing in the overcrowded, but intense, human environment they had before.

As a two-fold reaction against urban problems and social isolation, a residents' association was founded, almost at the same time the first buildings rose from the ground, in the Fall of 1957: the "Association Sarcelloise" (A.S.), initiated by political militants (left-wing socialists of the P.S.U.²³ and communists of the PCF²⁴). But clearly representing a broad range of public opinion, as symbolized by the fact that its first president was an apolitical moderate personality. By 1962, the A.S. had 800 members and its bulletin, "Sarcelles" had a regular readership of 5,000 copies. It was organized by neighborhood committees and building delegates, though its bureau was elected every year by a General Assembly of its membership. The first task of the A.S. was to group people, not only on the basis of urban demands, but on a variety of social and cultural activities lacking in Sarcelles: a library, a civic-club, a legal counseling service, a local newspaper. . . . By the early 1960s, about 100 voluntary associations existed in Sarcelles, under the impulse and example of the A.S. militants. Yet, in the general atmosphere of political deception in 1960s, France, the merger between acute urban problems and voluntary association's militancy needed some dramatic circumstances powerful enough to trigger spontaneous grass-roots mobilization. The first such event came in 1963 when the heating system of a building exploded because of the bad quality of the construction. Three people were killed. Meetings of protest were organized, demanding the reorganization of the heating system, separating the central heaters from the building. The SCIC refused: it was too costly and the logic of the public developer was to reduce expenses as much as possible, so that a maximum of the housing crisis' victims could be absorbed through the "grands ensembles'" programs. Then, a few weeks later, a cold Sunday afternoon, at the time most families were together at

home, the heating system broke down, again, leaving freezing temperatures in most flats: 1,500 people took the streets of Sarcelles. On their behalf, the A.S. negotiated with the SCIC and obtained the revision of the entire installation, the removal of heaters from the buildings, and their location in buried sites respecting the norms of safety. For the first time, a mass mobilization had forced the builder to recognize that the grands ensembles' residents were not ready to accept any kind of conditions out of pure gratitude for cheap rental housing. In fact, safety became one of the main themes of urban demands in Sarcelles. For instance, in 1967, the stairs of building number 57 broke down, killing one person. Under the pressure of the A.S. a commission found that most stairs were in shaky condition, as a result of a building model conceived by the same architect and constructed by the same company. The SCIC was forced to reconstruct the stairs in the entire city to meet the security standards. In some extent, the struggle over safety expressed the confrontation between two logics: for the residents, Sarcelles had to provide them with quality housing, to compensate for distance, isolation, and lack of urban environment; for the SCIC, the first stage of Sarcelles was some sort of urban welfare, so that costs had to be kept down, even if construction was so poor as to become physically dangerous. The first urban struggles forced widespread repairs and maintenance, while dissuading the developer from continuing the same practice in the future. As a result, the SCIC decided that if housing had to be of higher quality, the residents should pay for it. The following programs were designed for higher-income people. The already built units saw their rents raised. Such a move threatened the fragile family budget of most residents and led to one of the most important and significant struggles in Sarcelles: the rent strike of 1965.

In the fall of 1965, the SCIC launched its new policy of making public-housing investments somewhat more profitable. Sarcelles was the largest "grand ensemble" and had a symbolic value, so rents were increased there first. The average rent increased by 25%. The Association Sarcelloise decided to resist the increase. A meeting of 400 residents decided to continue paying the rent at its former level while refusing to pay the amount of the increase. A demonstration by 1,700 tenants supported the decision. The SCIC reacted by threatening eviction, and sent eviction notices to all rent strikes. The Association collected over 500 of these notices and sent them back to the SCIC, categorically refusing to pay and denouncing SCIC's attempt to individualize the conflict. To the personal relationship between tenant and landlord, the A.S. tried to oppose the collective bargaining between the residents and the public developer, which was precisely what the SCIC wanted to avoid. To nullify the rent increase in Sarcelles meant to abandon the new rent policy in all the "grands ensembles" under SCIC's management, since its public-service role required the same policy to be followed nationally.

So, in spite of the residents mobilization, SCIC rejected any negotiation and put increasing pressure on tenants, including the use of personal intimidation by the buildings' janitors. Since, there was no chance for the residents to find such cheap housing in spite of higher rents, in the private market, so many tenants ceased the strike. To avoid being abandoned by its constituency, the A.S. withdrew in good order, declaring the end of the rent strike by January 1966. Yet, the defeat was only apparent. On the basis of the representativeness and determination shown by the A.S., a long negotiation took place that resulted, in 1968, in the signature of an agreement between the SCIC and all the residents' associations on a

lease for all rental housing in Sarcelles. The major improvement was the indexing of rent according to the cost of construction. The SCIC won the possibility of a steady increase every three years. The tenants won protection against arbitrary sudden increases. Furthermore, the principle was established that the lease was a collective bargaining process between residents and developer, ending the individualistic relationship between landlord and tenant. As a consequence of the socialization of housing production and management, collective bargaining had entered the process of consumption.

In fact, SCIC was well aware of such an evolution. It knew that tensions were increasing in Sarcelles and that Sarcelles could well be the vanguard of a similar evolution in all the "grands ensembles". In 1965, the chairman of the Board of Directors of the "Caisse des Dépôts," the financial institution behind the SCIC, M. Bloch-Lainé, an innovative Gaullist technocrat, asked the University of Paris' Institute of Political Science, to study the situation. The "Sérieux Report" concluded that "the individual relationship that, according to the law, is the only link between the landlord and the tenant, is no longer a suitable framework for the new administrative and human reality of the grands ensembles." As a result, the report recommended and the SCIC accepted, the creation of elected "Residents' Councils" in each "grand ensembles." To implement the decision, the SCIC opened negotiations with national tenants unions of all tendencies, to determine the content and functioning of these "Residents' Councils." Significantly enough, the CNL,²⁵ UNAF,²⁶ APF,²⁷ and CSF,²⁸ all of them national organizations, participated in the negotiation with the SCIC, along with the "Association Sarcelloise": a major indication of the strategic role played by the mobilization in Sarcelles in influencing the

new participating policy of the public-housing sector. On June 26 1965, a National Covenant was signed between the SCIC and all participating organizations, that established the existence of Residents' Councils in each grand ensemble. Elected on the basis of one vote per housing unit, among the candidacies presented by voluntary associations existing in each grand ensemble. Grass-roots' movements saw their presence institutionally recognized for the first time. The Council must be informed by the Developer of all matters concerning rents and payments. It also had some rights of consultation on planning issues once took responsibility in the management of cultural equipments and collective facilities. Yet its powers were largely undefined and their extent was a function of the actual local power relationships, leading to endless conflicts. In Sarcelles, the Council was elected in February 1966. The "Association Sarcelloise" won the election, with eight seats out of eighteen, followed by the moderate "Association des Familles" with six seats, and the Homeowners Association with three seats. Under the impulse of the A.S. the Council, instead of being an instrument of participation, became a platform for urban struggle. Among other demands, it obtained from the SCIC the decentralization of management of the grands ensembles, from SCIC's national office to local "Cooperatives" that took care of the specific problems of each residential unit. In most "grands ensembles" the new Cooperative of Housing Management was simply a decentralized, more flexible, form of administration under the SCIC's total control. In Sarcelles, under pressure from the Residents' Council, the SCIC conceded something else: the residents' representation would share the management of the Grand Ensemble, including the budget. It was the beginning of an urban co-management strategy that the "Association Sarcelloise" had included in its program as a new approach to societal issues on the

basis of urban mobilization. In that sense, the agreement reached on December 14, 1967, opened the way for a far-reaching urban movement. Yet what appeared to be the most important victory of the A.S. became the source of its destruction. By jumping to the level of an explicit political strategy (that is, the co-management of the urban system on the basis of grass-roots organizations) the Association Sarcelloise released the forces of an internal conflict that had been boiling up for years, a conflict that became particularly acute after the municipal elections of 1965.

In 1965, on the basis of widespread urban unrest and grass-roots organization, the left-wing parties challenged the conservative coalition controlling the municipality. It was not an easy task. The sector of population that had come from Algeria was a solid stronghold of the extreme right. And while the suburban working-class in Paris tended to vote more communist and socialist than any other sector of the population, Sarcelles did not have a working-class majority. Yet on the basis of the urban mobilization of the middle class, the left obtained enough votes among this sector to win the election with a narrow edge (6,204 votes against 5,797). A city council was elected with nineteen communists (including the Mayor), six socialists, and six left-wing socialists (PSU). Since then, the left majority was reelected, in the 1971 and 1977 municipal elections, with the Communist Mayor increasing his vote, and becoming in 1977, the representative of the Sarcelles-district in the French Parliament. Such a political success of the left dramatically reversed the situation in Sarcelles. The SCIC had to face a municipality ready to fight to obtain urban equipment, social services, and jobs for the city residents. The City of Sarcelles increasingly became a major center of demand and negotiation, whose action was often decisive in improving the urban equipment. For instance, in the

period 1971-1974, the City Council participated very actively in public mobilizations to obtain more schools from the Ministry of Education to meet the needs of the growing population of children in Sarcelles. At the same time, such a very active role of the municipality as the center of social mobilization entered into open conflict with the development of autonomous urban movements in Sarcelles. The confrontation centered on the role of the Residents' Council. For the communists, and for the majority of the City Council, the Residents' Council was a useless trap prepared for the developer to bypass the politically representative body of the population. For the Association Sarcelloise, whose leadership was mainly in the hands of left-wing socialists (PSU), the Residents' Council had a different function from that of the Municipality. They had to represent the residents as tenants and urban consumers, while the Municipality was the political representation of citizens, within the limits of the state institutions. The distinction was too subtle for Sarcelles' communists. Unable to control the A.S., fearful of its influence in the Residents' Council, they split it. The A.S. communist militants pulled out of the Association, to form the local branch of the C.N.L., the national tenants' union close to the Communist Party. They challenged the A.S. in the next elections of the Residents' Council in 1968. The new Council gave six seats to the CNL, five to the A.S., four to the conservative Families' Association, and three to the Homeowners Association. On the basis of the sharp split between the CNL and the A.S., a homeowner was elected President and the Council became paralyzed for ever. The Association Sarcelloise did not survive the crisis. It became reduced to a skeleton, a platform controlled by PSU militants, something totally different from the broad popular basis that was at its origin. The CNL never replaced it. Composed, in 50% of its

members, by Communist Party's militants, it concentrated in following the national campaigns organized by the CNL and the local initiatives proposed by the Municipality. Since 1968, the urban movement in Sarcelles has been dead, at least under the form of voluntary grass-roots organization. The crisis between the A.S. and the PCF was not a simple sectarian feud. It reflected deep differences in the conception of the relationship between urban demands and the political system. For the PCF, in Sarcelles as elsewhere, urban movements laid the foundation for the party, and its allies, to be elected at the local level. Municipalities were not seen mainly, as elements of urban government, but as instruments of demand, putting pressure on the central government to obtain the improvement of material conditions for the residents, so that they can identify such improvement with support for the Communist Party, opening the way for the election of a national government with strong communist participation. In this sense, the contradiction between the A.S. and the PCF was not a contradiction between movement and party, but between two conceptions of urban trade-unionism. For the A.S., since the municipality was a legitimate element of the democratic state, residents should organize as such on non-political grounds and take responsibility for the self-management of their urban condition, while expressing their political will at the municipal level. For the PCF, within the bourgeois state, municipalities, not urban movements, are the equivalent of labor trade-unionism at the level of the work place. Rejecting the illusion of being able to manage the urban crisis within the capitalist system, the PCF proceeds by steps, from grass-roots agitation to the control of local governments as a launching platform against the capitalist-controlled national government. Such is the reason of its implacable fight against the urban self-management orientation of the

Association Sarcelloise. To accept the existence of an autonomous urban movement would be to deprive the party of its only real weapon: its organizational leadership of the rebellious popular masses.

Yet the popular origins of Sarcelles' municipal trade-unionism left their trace on the institutions of local government. The City of Sarcelles was one of the first in France to establish "neighborhood committees" in which residents of each neighborhood are regularly informed by a City Council member of matters of concern to them, and they can express their opinion on an advisory basis.

Furthermore, the popular pressure exercised throughout the 1960s by the Association Sarcelloise produced two major effects on the city:

(a) It actually changed the political orientation of the population, particularly among the middle-class. Table 3 provides some statistical indication about the extent to which the middle-class and the clerical workers engaged themselves in Sarcelles against the interests of the SCIC, and as an indirect consequence, against the government's housing policy. It is such a experience of collective mobilization on the basis of housing issues that seems to account for the change of political attitude of a middle- and lower-middle class marked until then by its separation from the working-class into the work place. It was on the basis of such a transformation of attitude that the Left (led by the Communists) were able to conquer for the first time a local government in a non-working class city.

(b) Under the combined pressure of the Association Sarcelloise in 1957-68, and the Communist municipality since 1965, Sarcelles became a relatively well equipped suburban commune, with large cultural facilities,

TABLE 3

Comparison of the Social Composition of the Leadership of the Association Sarcelloise, and of the Association des Families in Relationship to the Residents of Sarcelles and to the Residents of the Paris Metropolitan Area, 1968:
Percent Total of Each Residential Category,
Selected Categories for Associations' Militants

	Paris Metropolitan Area	Sarcelles	Association Sarcelloise	Association Familiale
Manual Workers	.35	.30	.09	.08
Clerks	.22	.31	.37	.16
Technicians and Middle-Level Management	.14	.19	.37	.59
Professionals and Managers	.09	.07	.09	.24
Small Business	.08	.02	--	--
Personal Service Workers	.08	.05	--	--
Farmers	.006	--	--	--
Agricultural Workers	.006	--	--	--
Others	.03	.06	.08	--

Sources: (a) Paris and Sarcelles: INSEE Census 1968

(b) Associations' militants: estimation on the basis
of lists of candidacy to Residents Council
elections and composition of the Associations' Boards.

commercial equipment, social services, and good schools. From the simple reproduction of labor power, it shifted to the status of an advanced middle-level city. Partly, such an evolution was due to the SCIC's policy of increasing the proportion of condominiums and high-quality housing in the city. But such a policy was itself the result of pressures from the residents to obtain a quality of housing and urban services that the SCIC tried to meet by raising prices and upgrading social status at the same level. The municipality also tried to change its status of "suburban dormitory" by attracting business and jobs, by building a giant shopping center, and by helping the SCIC to construct extensive office space. In fact, such efforts largely failed. But they are significant in terms of the magnitude of the effort undertaken by municipally-based collective consumption trade-unionism to challenge the urban status assigned to each locality by the spatial division of labor.

The debate remains open between the two styles of urban trade-unionism. A debate that perhaps has its best expression in the favorite anecdote of Sarcelle's urban militants: the Municipal Library of Monsieur Grassot. He was a founding member of the Association Sarcelloise. His passion: books. There was no public library in Sarcelles by 1959. So he undertook to create one. In the rural village's Town Hall, they had some books. He added a few of his own and his friends'. He ended up with a list of available books that he gave to the janitors of each building. Residents would check the list and ask for a book. Every month M. Grassot would pick up the list of requests and would ride his bicycle to the flat of each potential reader, to bring him/her the solicited book. Readership dramatically increased in Sarcelles. So, when the Left-wing parties were elected to Sarcelles' City government, a priority was to build a Municipal

Library. They did it. It was a modern, spacious building, with silent, carpeted reading rooms. It was open every day from 9 to 5, just the time people were at work and most women occupied in child care and domestic work. M. Grassot, as a recognition for his civic service, became a municipal librarian. But he felt that his task did not make sense anymore. One day he sold everything, bought a van and a pile of books, and left Sarcelles, to go to Lozère, a beautiful rural province, in central France, where he still goes around the villages lending books every month on the basis of requests from residents of communities without libraries who want to read at home.

Romantic? Of course! But it was such a romanticism that equipped Sarcelles, that laid the ground for the middle-class voting left, that created the Residents' Councils, that imposed collective bargaining on public-housing rents, and that, ultimately, led the SCIC to alter the urban form it was producing by proposing a new model of Grand Ensemble whose prototype was going to be the Val d' Yerres.

3. The Social Limits of Urban Design: Val d' Yverres

In 1965, the year the residents of Sarcelles elected for the first time a Communist Mayor, the SCIC launched the development of a new type of grand ensemble in response to the challenge posed by mounting public criticism to the results of its housing policy. The design of the Val d' Yverres, 6,000 housing units and about 30,000 people in 1974, was aimed at overcoming the evils that parisian residents and opinion leaders had come to blame on the grands ensembles. In short, the public developer wanted to prove that nothing was wrong with the concept of the grand ensemble and that the pitfalls of the early stages of such a housing policy were due mainly to the acuteness of the crisis, forcing a quick response to the dramatic needs of a rapidly growing population. By then, in the mid-sixties, France was relying on a sustained high rate of economic growth.²⁹ A very active public-housing policy in the Paris metropolitan area between 1953 and 1963 had eased to some extent the sharpest manifestations of the problem.³⁰ People could afford to pay more for housing, so private capital could be attracted to a joint venture strategy in exchange from the support of the state in land policy and provision of urban services.³¹ Profitability could be linked to public interest, on the basis of an expanding solvent market. On such a solid ground, a new emphasis on housing quality could substitute for the former priorities of quantity and affordability.³² To the challenge of urban protest the SCIC would oppose the solutions of urban design. The Val d' Yverres would be a new type of grand ensemble, and even more, a new urban form.³³

To start with, it would overcome the separation between the city and the countryside. It would be the city in the countryside: a garden city on

a large scale. Thus, it was essential to locate it in a very rural surrounding, 25 kms. southeast of Paris, on the territory of three communes, Epinay-Sous-Sénart, Boussy, and Quincy, where the SCIC could acquire a large piece of land (312 Hectares) at a very low price (2.5 Francs per square meter). Besides the price, the criteria to choose the site was its natural beauty: a wooden hilly area, extremely green, crossed by a clear small river, with a charming old farm in the middle of the domain. The construction carefully preserved all these elements, including the farm, which was restored and transformed into the socio-cultural center of the new grand ensemble. The result was a quite remarkable natural landscape that became one of the main advertising supports of the sales office, whose headquarters was naturally set at "La Ferme," the restored old farm.

Furthermore, the quality of the environment was also enhanced by a deliberate effort in architectural diversity. Instead of reproducing the gigantic high-rise buildings in parallel rows, typical of most "grands ensembles," the Val d'Yerres took the shape of a series of different urban units scattered along a natural open space, each with its own style. The SCIC even tried some experiments of nordic architecture, some of the neighborhoods being built in the Finnish and Danish styles. And, for the first time in French public housing, single-family dwellings were built in a grand ensemble, mixed with high-rise buildings of moderate height and unusually good construction quality.

The diversity of housing did not only concern the building forms. More significantly it included a variety of housing standards and legal status, with 48% percent of the units in home ownership, and 19% of the total being single-family dwellings. The result: a very mixed urban

TABLE 4

Distribution of Housing Units in the
Grand Ensemble of Val d' Yverres,
According to the Commune of Their Location and
to Their Characteristics:
Percent of Total of Each Commune, 1973

Communes	Housing Characteristics								
	Rental		Ownership		Buildings		Single-Family Dwellings		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Epinay	2,347	59.7	1,582	40.3	3,380	86.0	549	14.0	3,929
Boussy	297	22.5	1,027	77.5	887	67.0	43.7	33.0	1,324
Quincy	488	58.4	347	1.6	664	79.5	171	20.5	835
TOTAL	3,132	51.4	2,956	48.6	4,931	81.0	1,157	19.0	6,088

profile that tried to combine the new environmental frontier being conquered by the SCIC with its long-standing responsibility as an essential tool of the public housing policy expected to fulfill its public interest goals. In fact, the Val d' Yverres was more open than Sarcelles to low-income groups, in spite of the higher level of rents being required. The reason for such an apparent paradox is that access to public rental housing in France is basically dependent upon the institutional channel selected to entitle future tenants. In the case of Sarcelles, industrial companies and public administrations, having contributed to the public housing fund, were

given priority to house their employees. In the case of the Val d' Yverres, the "Prefecture"³⁴ received 27% of the HLM units, which were largely reserved to the most dramatic cases of housing and, particularly the families displaced in the city of Paris by the urban renewal program. This is the means through which a substantial number of immigrant workers (around 10% of the residents) managed to locate in the Val d' Yverres.

So, the social composition of the population was extended toward the two ends of the social spectrum, to include a significant proportion of managers and professionals, as well as manual workers, as is shown in Table 5. Such a social diversity must be qualified by a tendency toward residential segregation between different social classes within the grand ensembles. The municipality of Boussy concentrated the middle-class while Epinay had a much higher proportion of manual workers, with Quincy occupying an intermediate position. Yet, the main social cleavage, as one could expect, was between rental housing and owner occupied housing. And though Boussy concentrated the large majority of high standing owner occupied programs, there was a significant amount of overlapping in the two other communes, and in fact, the highest standing of single family dwellings, the neighborhood known as "Le Gué Mandres" (86 units) happened to be at Epinay, surrounded by high-rise rental public housing. Yet, it is clear that in spite of the trend toward spatial segregation between social groups according to the location of housing with different levels of quality and price, the project of the SCIC was to reduce social segregation while maintaining social diversity. There was an explicit communal ideology aimed at reconstructing a shared social world within the grand ensemble, to foster neighborhood life, in sharp contrast with the anonymity of the great metropolis beyond the shore-line marked by the highway and the railroad station. The

TABLE 5

Social Composition of Val d' Yverres Residents,
by Community and Housing Status, 1968 and 1971:
Percent of Total of Each Spatial Unit

	Boussy-1968 (the entire commune)	Quincy-1971 Homeowners	Epinay-1971 Homeowners	Quincy-1971 Rental Housing	Epinay-1971 Rental Housing
Professionals and Managers	15.40	15.60	1.81	0.39	0.30
Technicians and Middle-level Management	24.30	31.60	26.40	11.33	7.76
Clerks	22.40	25.30	42.13	34.00	38.00
Manual Workers	23.50*	10.00	15.90	36.33	41.10
Personal Service Workers	6.00	0.80	1.09	0.78	3.25
Small Business and Businessmen		4.00	12.10	3.80	0.78
Others	3.40	4.60	8.86	16.40	8.57

*These in fact are mostly previous residents of Boussy, not included in the Val d' Yverres

Source: (a) 1968: French Government Census (INSEE)
(b) 1971: Survey by Social Workers of the Communes,
Members of SCIC's Local Staff

Val d' Yverres was supposed not only to provide the joys of nature, but to reconstruct the moral order of society. The major instrument for such an ambitious project was a sophisticated institutional network of "animation sociale,"³⁵ that is a combination of social work with cultural activities and community organizing, initiated and paid for by the SCIC itself. The common purpose of all these activities was to stimulate the residents to develop an active neighborhood life, so that the grand ensemble would not be the space of social anonymity and cultural alienation that such an urban form had come to symbolize. Nevertheless, the implementation of the

community program was differentiated along social lines. "La Ferme," the old farm, became the center of a series of "high class" activities, such as ballet lessons, music and theater performances, public lectures, pottery and craft courses, as well as political meetings. On the other hand, in the rental public-housing units, the basic mechanism was to hire social workers to help organize residents, around their hobbies and their specific housing demands. The SCIC had learned the lesson by then: socialized housing was likely to lead to collective action. So it appeared more fruitful to accept the fact and to try to channel it from the beginning. The working-class teenagers at Epinay also had their ad hoc institution: the "Jardin de l' Aventure." Behind such a suggestive name, there was a tree-spotted open space for their free use, and a specialized social worker with athletic capabilities. The program: a free space where teenagers could play and interact after school with some advice and control. The goal: to prevent the formation of deviant youth groups. A number of other activities, such as sport competitions, "mom clubs," and elderly-oriented social gatherings, completed the mechanism through which the SCIC hoped to overcome the lack of human interaction and to improve social life in these communities, designed to become the new generation of grand ensemble. Yet, such an appealing urban vision started to fade from the very moment of its implementation. The communal networks never came to life, except as a result of neighborhood mobilizations to which we will refer below. Most residents reacted with hostility to the attempt to create an integrated social space. The homeowners of Epinay petitioned to have their open space enclosed and separated, so that the children of the public housing units could not play with theirs. Immigrant families faced open racism, expressed through complaints against their smoky cooking or their noisy

chatting. Youth were blamed for every possible mistake, and by 1972-73 many residents were asking for permits to own handguns, as well as increased police patrolling. In fact, our examination of the records in the local police precinct showed no evidence of significant increase in crime. The general feeling of insecurity seemed to come in some extent from the uneasiness of experiencing a spatial propinquity to social groups that were formerly considered as strangers. By bringing together profitable housing and public service, the SCIC had broken the rules of spatial segregation, while still trying to sell social status to the middle class. It was to ignore the fact that spatial distance is an essential component of symbolic distinction in a mass society where cultural differences are less apparent between individuals.³⁶

The Social segregation extended to the community activities that, in fact, had been programmed along class lines: no workers, for instance, would attend the cultural events at "La Ferme," or even visit the place. Segregation increased the chances for each community-oriented social program to reach the critical mass that would foster spontaneous social interaction. Social workers spent most of their time helping people to handle their economic and urban problems. For Val d' Yverres' residents, daily commuting to Paris and the immediate periphery (two and half hours per day, in the average) consumed most of their energy, given the lack of public transportation from the grand ensemble to the suburban train station, and the poor service offered by the railway system. Besides, while housing quality and natural environment received special attention, most basic social equipment, depending on the other governmental agencies, was missing for several years. In 1974, nine years after the beginning of the grand ensemble, no medical emergency service was available for the 30,000

residents. The legally required schools were so slow to be approved, that the SCIC had to advance the necessary funds to pay for the building of the schools. Facing daily life difficulties without places or occasions to meet or cooperate beyond the pre-scheduled cultural activities, residents experienced an increasingly impoverished social interaction: community life did not take off as it had been foreseen in the SCIC's scenario. Yet, on one particular level, the social integration strategy seemed to work: in spite of the large deficits in urban equipment, for several years people did not stage collective protest, in open contrast with what happened in most parisian "grands ensembles." There were problems, but their solution followed generally an individualistic pattern. A typical example of such a reaction was the mechanism we discovered when we tried to understand the lack of demands for day care centers, in spite of the fact that many women were working full-time and desperately needed some form of child care. We observed that most women started to work after they had settled in the Val d' Yerres, because it was the only way for the family to pay the rent required by such high-quality housing (between 50% and 100% higher than an equivalent public housing unit in Sarcelles while ninety percent of tenants' families in the Val d' Yerres were earning less than 2,000 Francs a month in 1973). Then, the following question was to ask how families with only one salary were able to equilibrate their budget. The answer was: by taking care of the children of the working women. So, in fact, each woman's salary was being shared (roughly in a 60-40 proportion) with another woman, so that children could be taken care of in the neighborhood and that both women could decisively contribute to the improvement of the family's standards of living by giving away their time at an incredibly low hourly rate.³⁷ Under these conditions, any demand for public child care

would threaten the delicate equilibrium established spontaneously by women as an individual way out of the social problems represented by their low-paid jobs and their unsupported child-rearing responsibilities. So such a demand was never expressed.

Nevertheless, by the time of our observation (1972-74) urban protest movements had begun to develop in the Val d' Yverres, actually calling into question the completion of the grand ensemble and seriously curtailing its appeal as a successful example of a more humane housing policy. They surged along two very different lines of urban problematic, representing what were in fact the two major contradictions underlying the Val d' Yverres' experiment: on the one hand, the contradiction between its role as a public housing agency and the high cost of the housing units as a consequence of the improvement in the standards of quality; on the other hand, the contradiction between the preservation of the natural environment and the high density of housing and urban functions that the SCIC had to achieve in order to keep the level of profitability required by the private capital it had attracted into the operation.

The cost of the newly acquired housing quality appeared to be very high for the working-class families of the rental housing sector. Yet it was difficult, as it was in Sarcelles, to oppose the level of rents because they were fixed at the national level, by the public housing authority (the HLM) for a given size and quality that put the Val d' Yverres among the very top residential category. Thus, tenants were often unable to pay the rents, and legal evictions for overdue payment were frequent, without any reaction from a resident population that knew the lack of decisional capacity on the part of the local public housing authority to change the

national rent policy.

Nevertheless, the rigidity of the public rent system also caused serious problems to the SCIC's management of the Val d' Yverres, facing much higher maintenance costs than in any other grand ensemble. Unable to raise the rents, it acted on the elements of the budget in which it had some discretionary power: the charges for miscellaneous facilities (water, janitors, gardening, heating, cleaning, etc.). The dramatic rise of these charges in 1973 triggered the revolt in the public housing unit of Gerbeaux at Epinay: 100 families refused to pay the increase and resisted the threats of eviction by management. They successfully argued the malfunctioning of water counters, the artificial differences in the price of heating between similar buildings, and the unfairness of the procedure forcing tenants to pay for the maintenance of a natural environment that was actually the main marketing argument by the SCIC to convince people to live in isolation in the Val d' Yverres. After weeks of rent strikes, demonstrations, and negotiations, the tenants won. The SCIC accepted the miscalculation of the charges, lowered the charges, and paid back excess payments to the residents of the "Gerbeaux" (about 750 families) in the three years preceeding the struggle: about 170,000 Francs were refunded to the tenants. Around such a victory, the mobilized tenants created a local section of the CNL that quickly spread to other public-housing rental units in all the neighborhoods of the Val d' Yverres. Throughout the following year, similar struggles took place on issues such as the charges for water supply, the repair of the heating system, the replacement of public benches, and the strict regulation of automobile traffic within the residential units. Triggered by the high cost of housing, an urban trade-unionism, similar to the one born in Sarcelles, gradually grew up in the very grand ensemble

that was supposed to give birth to a modern communal utopia.

Nevertheless, the decisive blow to the new urban scenario came from the rebellion of the well-to-do single-family-dwelling homeowners of Boussy. Highly educated (forty-five percent college graduates) counting a majority of technicians and professionals among their numbers, they revolted when the SCIC tried to sacrifice some elements of the highly publicized environmental quality to enhance the program's profitability. Once the image of the Val d' Yerres was established as a low-density, good-quality, environmentally agreeable urban unit, the SCIC started to densify the grand ensemble, by building several fifteen-story buildings, along with a shopping center, in the middle of the most beautiful area, at Boussy. To do so, they decided to bulldoze a small wood. Local residents massively opposed such a move. They appropriated the wood, planting flowers, installing playgrounds, using it for picnics and promenades. They also attacked the SCIC's initiative as an unfair move to reverse the environmental quality of the Val d' Yerres, once the program had been sold. Their mobilization altered the project: the wood was preserved, and the density of the new buildings was somewhat reduced.

In the process, a local residents' association consolidated its existence and sharpened its militancy: the GERB.³⁸ Initially formed by a group of middle-class young couples, echoing at their local level the themes of cultural innovation sparked by the May 1968 Movement, the defense of environment allowed the group to shift from their intellectual criticism, often expressed in the events at "La Ferme," to a grass-rooted expression of the residents' concerns. Their favorite theme was a very political one: information. Arguing that the cause for the potential

destruction of environment was the secrecy of the negotiations between the SCIC and the municipal government about the future of the grand ensemble, they required the institutionalization of extra-municipal committees where all residents could ask questions of the elected city council members and insist that they respect their public commitments. Denouncing the manipulatory aim of the SCIC's advertising to sell the Val d' Yverres, they undertook counter-publicity campaigns. For instance, when the SCIC organized, on a sunny Sunday, the "Val d' Yverres' Olympic Games," radio-advertised to attract a crowd of potential home buyers, GERB members disturbed the competition by parading in the streets of the grand ensemble with music, jokes, and painted banners. To take the streets, to make them an expression of protest and a place of social interaction, was one of the main goals of the GERB, opposed to normalized and pre-programmed cultural activities of the "La Ferrme" type. Yet, it was at "La Ferrme" that the group usually met, and it was its cultural activities that provided the organizational basis for the creation of a socio-political network through the public criticisms several residents addressed to one event or another. What was intended to be an apparatus of social integration became the medium of cultural critique. Through the action of the GERB the new suburban middle-class discovered its own style of urban protest, focussed on the defense of alternative life styles, yet confusingly perceived, rather than on strictly economic issues.

Thus, in some extent, the Val d' Yverres, instead of subduing the urban movement emerging in the grands ensembles, actually triggered it in two different forms. In addition to the Sarcelles-like collective-consumption trade-unionism, we observed in the Val d' Yverres the rise of an alternative urban culture, highly sensitive to the themes that would later become

associated with the ecologists in the USA or the "green parties" in Western Europe. The two forms of movement seem to correspond to two different social and urban situations, as Table 6 suggests. On the one hand, we had a movement of working-class tenants defending the price and level of their living conditions.

TABLE 6

Estimated Social Profile of Membership in the
Local Tenants Union (CNL) and in the
Ecologist-Type Neighborhood Group (GERB):

Percent of Total Membership

	GERB	CNL
Professionals and Managers	22	03
Technicians and Middle-Management	35	10
Clerks	19	37
Manual Workers	09	42
Others	15	08

Source: Our estimation on the basis of the Association's files.

On the other hand, a new type of urban movement arose, basically formed by

homeowners, technicians, and professionals, oriented toward the defense of the environment, the improvement of neighborhood life, and the enrichment of local democracy. Such a correspondence between urban situation, social basis, and orientation of the urban movement seems to be a well established pattern of urban mobilization. A clear confirmation of such a hypothesis lies in the observation of the influence of movements that the CNL tried to state among the tenants in the middle-class dominated community of Quincy, or the organizational effort that middle-class residents (grouped in the C.R.I.³⁹) in the predominantly working-class' Epinay, attempted, following the model proposed by the GERB at Boussy: both attempts failed because of the lack of interest in the specific neighborhoods for the kind of themes developed by local organizations outside of a receptive social context. Though we cannot (yet) draw conclusions about the difficulty of class alliances within the same urban movement, it clearly indicates a strong assumption about the social diversity of urban protest.

Nevertheless, in the case of the Val d' Yverres, both forms of grassroots mobilization converged toward the political crisis that shook the basis of the grand ensemble, precipitating the fate of the housing policy it symbolized. The CNL won the elections to the Residents' Council, and transformed it into a platform to support its demands instead of being an instrument of social integration. The GERB decided to enter municipal politics on its own, challenging parties from both the right and the left, and in the first municipal elections, in 1971, it came second, after the right-wing list, with 24% of the vote at Boussy. By 1971, the Val d' Yverres was in process of formation and the traditional local notables were still able to control the municipal elections in the three communes. The expression of the urban protest in a strong electoral showing by left-wing

parties had to wait until the next election, in 1977, sometime after our direct observation of the process had concluded. Yet the crisis of urban policy came well before that year, under the combined impact of the grass-roots protest and the new orientations in national housing policy, themselves partly influenced by that protest. The precipitating event for the crisis of the Val d' Yverres was what the residents called "the battle of the ZAC."⁴⁰

The ZAC (zone of concerted planning) is a legal procedure, introduced in French urban law in 1967, that allows a developer, for reasons of public utility, to waive the restrictions imposed by the Master Plan, particularly in terms of the density of the urbanized area. By 1972, the SCIC realized that in order to reach its two goals of housing quality and financial profitability, it had to densify the grand ensemble, even sacrificing some of the natural environment, to expand from the program of 6,000 housing units to a new total of 9,000. To do so, it projected several fifteen-story buildings, and a regional shopping center. As discussed above, residents mobilized to save a small wood that was promised to clearance. The local governments, though basically accepting the SCIC's plan, used the pretext of an unrestful public opinion to bargain hard in order to obtain from the SCIC a substantial subsidy per unit, to pay for the addition of newly required urban equipment. They also obtained the transfer to the local governments of some basic social equipments, including "La Ferme," the pride of the developer. The negotiations took almost two years. When they were successfully concluded, in March 1974, and when the SCIC was finally ready to launch the new ZAC, to complete the Val d' Yverres, the final explosion happened. The Prefet, representing the Central Government, denied the permission for such a new program. There had been too much

noise about it, too many bureaucratic battles, too much delay for the urban infrastructure, and, above all, too much sensitivity among the suburban residents about the renewed failure of a grand ensemble to deliver the urban promises the SCIC had publicized so prominently. In April 1973, the "Circulaire Guichard" established a symbolic halt to the Grands Ensembles' policy. The SCIC did not really take it seriously: there was too much at stake, particularly for the biggest developer in France. Yet the residents of the Val d'Yerres reminded the government that their grand ensemble was getting bigger and bigger. The Prefet stopped the new development. The GERB organized a joyful "burial of the ZAC" in the streets of the by then alive community. Their victory celebration was the funeral of the grands ensembles.

The SCIC had stubbornly tried to overcome the residents' potential resistance by packaging a new urban product that had all the symbols of the demands that appeared in Sarcelles and in the large housing estates built in the early 1960s. Yet the search for more profitable construction led to higher density and called into question the well preserved natural landscape. The quality standards achieved in rental public housing went along with increased housing cost that most working-class tenants could not afford. Spatial proximity of different social classes actually increased social hostility, reducing the chances of neighborhood interaction. The mechanisms of social integration and cultural innovation became platforms of urban protest and expression of alternative values. Political control over the grand ensemble was being ended, in spite of a well planned institutional fragmentation.

Designed to overcome the challenge of society to the grands ensembles

as the urban profile of modernity, the Val d' Yverres became in fact the extreme expression of the contradictions of public-housing policy. By promising environmental quality to the middle class, cheap rental housing to workers, and profitable investment to capital, the SCIC tried to demonstrate how urban contradiction could be superseded by urban design. Val d' Yverres was going to be the first garden city of post-industrial France. It actually became the last grand ensemble of suburban Paris.

4. Conclusion: From Urban Trade-Unionism to Urban Movement

The social process underlying the rise and fall of the Parisian grands ensembles offers a striking illustration of the interplay between grassroots protest and housing policy. To respond to popular demands and functional needs pressing for affordable housing, the French state set up a comprehensive system of production and distribution of housing whose most direct spatial forms took the shape of the grands ensembles. Therefore, housing was partially socialized, that is, treated as a public service and integrated in a new type of urban unit that provided relatively uniform living conditions for a large cross-section of the population, under the centralized management of a government-supported agency. Operating within the constraints of a capitalist economy, such an agency still had to keep costs down, and to lay the foundation for profitable private investment in the housing market. The production of as much housing as possible, as quickly as possible, and at the lowest possible cost, led to the type of urban units symbolized by Sarcelles.

Since the relative homogeneity of living conditions made it easier for residents to realize the commonality of the urban problems they were

suffering, the socialization of housing led to the socialization of protest, overcoming the individual relationship between landlord and tenant. It is in this specific sense that we could think of the formation of a new type of movement: a collective consumption-oriented trade unionism, that would parallel at the residence place the Labor-Unions that the process of capitalist concentration of production and management had triggered at the work place.

The tenants unions organized in the grands ensembles, and the miscellaneous urban protests that took place in many suburbs throughout the 1960s,⁴¹ brought the new service workers and professional into the streams of collective action, widely contributing to a negative public opinion towards the grands ensemble, though still reinforcing the social demand for housing as a public service. The political impact of such movements was considerable, since, through their experience of collective protest, a significant fraction of the new suburban middle-class shifted its vote to Left-wing political parties, making possible the election of socialist and communist local governments in practically all municipalities of the Paris metropolitan area where the grands ensembles were located, in the short span of time between 1965 and 1977.⁴² The state in general, and the SCIC in particular, reacted to such trends by opening up the housing market to more affluent categories, by bringing private capital into joint ventures, and by producing a different type of urban product emphasizing environmental quality and neighborhood life. Our observation of the Val d'Yerres experience, the showroom of the new housing policy, suggests that the social contradictions that were supposedly being smothered by the new policy, were actually made much deeper. Along with a new wave of tenants unionism, the well-to-do middle class entered the battle of citizen

participation and environmental conservation, in search for an alternative life style, increasingly critical of state bureaucratic management and private capitalist profit in the production of urban forms.⁴³

The "Circulaire Guichard" of April 1973 was a first reaction to the political setbacks suffered by the Gaullists in the parisians "grands ensemble" in the parliamentary elections of March 1973.⁴⁴ But more important than the "circulaire" itself was the confirmation in the following months and years that a new urban mood was predominant among the parisian suburbanites, and that the large state-managed urban units were unprofitable in economic terms and unpopular in political terms. They were unprofitable because the bargaining power won by the residents' associations was forcing the management to deliver a quality of housing and a level of urban services that could not be financed as public housing any more without undertaking a major process of economic redistribution under the form of urban goods and services. They were unpopular, because the increasing rebellion of residents against their living conditions had focused the media and public opinion on the "inhuman urban forms" of the grands ensembles' type.

During the 1974 presidential campaign, Giscard D'Estaing, tactically sensitive to the new ecological themes, stated a clear distance between his approach to environmental issues and the heritage of gaullist housing policy. Once he won the election, he made a series of decisions: to stop the Paris Left-Bank Express Way, to reconsider the Les Halles Project, to halt extensive urban renewal, to implement a total reversal on the grands ensembles' policy.

Such a new urban policy, instead of discouraging the emergence of new urban movements, actually stimulated them, by legitimizing the arguments they have been making for years against the state housing technocracy.⁴⁵ But the movements that flourished at the local level in all major French cities, and particularly in suburban Paris, were much closer to the ones represented by the middle-class in the Val d' Yverres, than to those triggered in Sarcelles' public housing buildings. Environmental concerns and grass-roots democracy appeared more important for the new generation of neighborhood militants than the level of housing rents or the repair of the elevators.⁴⁶ The collective-consumption trade-unionism that seemed to have emerged with strong popular support during the 1960s faded away or remained stagnant. Two major factors seemed to be the reason for such a surprising, and significant, evolution:

(a) Their very success led to an improvement of the existing public-housing estates, and to a reversal of the housing policy leaning toward individual loans and subsidies operating through the private market, thus individualizing anew the relationship between landlord and tenant. It is crucial to observe that such a process of individualization was only possible because of the strictly economic level of the tenants' unions demands. By focusing on rents, repairs, and maintenance, by not dealing with the totality of urban problems, the tenants' unions tended to narrow their chances of success and to shrink their audience. In this sense, it is significant to observe that while the traditional national organization of tenants' (the CNL) lost ground during the 1970s, the second nation-wide organization, the CSCV, received new life when it expanded the realm of its initiatives from housing demands to all issues concerning the urban environment.⁴⁷

(b) Nevertheless, what seems to be most important for analytical purposes is to understand why the urban trade-unionists, in general, did not expand their sphere of action beyond very specific urban-related economic demands. The answer seems to be that they delegated all policy-oriented responsibilities to the Left-wing municipal governments. Urban movements, under Left-wing political leadership, were considered the instruments for laying the foundations for the political parties (communists and socialists) to win local and national elections to implement the policies of urban reform.⁴⁸

Thus, the parallel between Labor Unions and Collective Consumption Unions becomes apparent in its full meaning. They were considered as two demand-oriented movements whose social impact could only be fully accomplished by the political parties in the sphere of the State. Yet, recent historical experience, in Paris as elsewhere, seems to falsify such a hypothesis, discrediting the elegant, though incorrect, theoretical model that sees both movements as two streams flowing from the sources of production and consumption toward the high seas of the State, under the guidance of the Party's vessel.

What the French experience suggests is that urban movements cannot simply remain at the level of economic demands on collective consumption. Either they are something else or they do not last. What else they could be is the matter of another story. A story that can be only partially told under the shadow of the grands ensembles.

FOOTNOTES

¹For the urban evolution of Paris between 1945 and 1970 see Jean Lojkiné, La Politique Urbaine Dans La Région Parisienne (1945-1972), Paris: Mouton, 1973. For the process of formation of parisian suburbs, see Jean Bastie, La Croissance De La Banlieue Parisienne, Paris: P.U.F., 1967, and P.H. Chombart De Lauwe, Paris et l'Agglomération Parisienne (1952-1964), Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1965.

²The classical analysis on the process of production and management of the French grands ensembles is Edmond Preteceille, La Production Des Grands Ensembles, Paris: Mouton, 1973.

³See, for instance, M. Castells and F. Godard, Monopolville, Paris: Mouton, 1974.

⁴See Gilbert Mathieu, Peut-On Loger Les Français?, Paris: Seuil, 1965; also, G. Ebrik and P. Barjac, Le Logement, dossier noir de la France, Paris: Dunod, 1970.

⁵See INSEE Census, May 1954; INSEE Housing Survey, October 1955.

⁶See Pierre George et. al., Région Parisienne, Paris: P.U.F., 1965.

⁷See François Ascher and Chantal Lucas, "L'industrie du Bâtiment: Des Forces Productives à Libérer" in Economie et Politique, March 1974; also, Pierre Riboulet, "Une Construction Primitive Pour Une Société. Développée" in Espaces Et Sociétés, 6-7, 1973.

⁸See Suzanna Magri, La Politique De l'Etat en Matiere de Logement des Travailleurs, Paris: Centre De Sociologie Urbaine (C.S.U.), 1973.

⁹See Christian Topalov, Capital et Propriete Fonciere, Paris: C.S.U., 1973.

¹⁰See Claude Pottier, La Logique du Financement Public de l'Urbanisation, Paris: Mouton, 1975.

¹¹See Louis Houdeville, Pour Une Civilisation de l'Habitat, Paris: Editions Ouvrieres, 1969, especially pages 153-166.

¹²See Christian Topalov, "Politique Monopolist et Propriete du Logement" in Economie et Politique, March 1974; also: S. Magri (op. cit., 1973).

¹³SCIC stands for Societe Centrale Immobiliere De La Caisse Des Depots. The best study on the institutional and financial mechanisms of the SCIC is Christian Topalov, La SCIC: Etude Monographique d'un Groupe Immobilier Para-Public, Paris: C.S.U., Research Report, 1969.

¹⁴See Alain Lipietz, Le Tribut Foncier Urbain, Paris: Maspero, 1974.

¹⁵See Bernard Lamy, Nouveaux Ensembles d'Habitation et leur Environnement, Paris: C.S.U., 1972; also, Preteceille (op. cit., 1973).

¹⁶Henri Lefebvre, Le Droit à La Ville, Paris: Anthropos, 1968.

¹⁷Paul Clerc, Grands Ensembles Banlieues Nouvelles, Paris: P.U.F., 1967; similar trends can be observed in the more recent data presented in: Michel Pincon, Les HLM, Structure Sociale de la Population Logee, Paris: C.S.U., 1976, 2 Volumes.

¹⁸See the striking results of the sociological inquiry on attitudes and social behavior in the public-housing units by Alain Touraine, Nicole Cleuziou, Francoise Lentin, Une Societe Petite-Bourgeoise: le HLM, Paris: Centre de Recherche d'Urbanisme, Research Report, 1966.

¹⁹On the evolution of French housing policy and its underlying causes, see Manuel Castells, "The Evolution of the Urban Policy of the French State, 1967-1975," Chapter III of City, Class and Power, St. Martins' Press, New York, 1979.

²⁰See Eddy Cherki, Dominique Mehl, Anne-Marie Metailie, "Urban Struggles in Western Europe," in Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, (editors) The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968, London: MacMillan, 1978, Volume 2.

²¹Data on Sarcelles were directly gathered by our research. See the Mathematical Appendix for a description of sources.

²²Survey by Cinam, 1962.

²³Parti Socialiste Unifie.

²⁴Parti Communiste Francais

²⁵Confederation Nationale Du Logement.

²⁶Union Nationale Des Associations Familiales.

²⁷Association Populaire Des Familles.

²⁸Confederation Syndicale Des Familles.

²⁹See the most accurate study of the evolution of the French economy after 1965, Fresque Historique du Systeme Productif Francais, Paris: INSEE, 1974.

³⁰According to: INSEE, Housing Survey, 1970.

³¹See Christian Topalov, Les Promoteurs Immobiliers, Paris: Mouton, 1974.

³²See Jacques Henrard, Le Financement Public du Logement, Paris: CETEM, Research Report, 1975.

³³Data on the Val D' Yerres were gathered by our research. See the Methodological Appendix.

³⁴The Prefecture, headed by the Prefet, is the Delegation of the Centeal Government in each "Departement," the French administrative units above local governments.

³⁵"Animation Sociale": A combination of social work and community action. For a description and analysis of the mechanism see Jean Marie Charon, "Les Animateurs Sociaux" in Espaces et Societes, 9, 1974.

³⁶See Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Monique Lemaire, "Proximite Spatiale et Distance Sociale: Les Grands Ensembles et Leur Peuplement," in Revue Francaise de Sociologie, 11 (1), January 1970.

³⁷A female clerical worker in 1974 received an average monthly salary of 900 F for 45 hours of work per week. In addition, in the Val d' Yerres, they needed an average of two-and-a-half hours per day to commute to Paris. Thus, 57 hours per week and 228 per month represented their minimum time of non-domestic work. Since they were paying, an average of 400 Francs for child care, their actual monthly wage was 500 F, that is 2.20 Francs per

hour! (In 1974 approximately 30 U.S. cents.)

³⁸Groupe D'Etude et de Recherche Buxacien.

³⁹Carrefour de Recherche et D'Information.

⁴⁰Z.A.C.: Zone D'Amenagement Concertte. For an analysis of this new urban policy, see Jacotee Bobroff and Fabia Novatin, "Strategie Tactique et Necessite de Classe: la Politique d'Albin Chalandon," in Espaces et Sociétés, 2, 1971.

⁴¹For sources on urban struggles in Paris see the Special Issue of the Paris-based Journal Autrement, "Contre-Pouvoirs dans la Ville," Number 5, 1975.

⁴²Though the electoral shift to the Left in the Grands Ensembles is a well known trend of French politics, it has not yet been statistically established. An attempt is underway in the broader framework of a statistical analysis of the social determinants of Left-wing voting in French Municipal elections (1945-77) by Michael Aiken and Manuel Castells. It could also be argued that the trend toward Left-wing voting is a more general tendency of French politics during the 1970s. In fact we are assuming that, for the middle-class, there is a significant difference in political behavior according to the place of residence. For instance, technicians and professionals of similar status seem to vote differently depending upon their location in the city of Paris or in the suburban grands ensembles. The reason for such a difference is not, obviously, the difference of the physical environment, but a crucial intermediary variable: the level of urban mobilization triggered by the specific living conditions associated with the grands ensembles. The experience of collective protest against

interests generally associated with business and a right-wing government seems to lead to left-wing voting. Our current research on the French municipal elections will try to explore this problematic on more rigorous grounds.

⁴³See the excellent analysis of the evolution of the problematic underlying French urban movements by Dominique Mehl, "Les voies de la Contestation Urbaine," in Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine, Number 2, 1979.

⁴⁴The actual decision-making process of the "Circulaire Guichard" was described to the author in personal conversation by a high-ranking French civil servant, who received the orders from Guichard, Minister of Equipement, after a tempestuous cabinet meeting. Though the anecdote could not be accepted as scientific evidence, it considerably reinforced our personal belief in the proposed interpretation. For a broader interpretation of the sudden change in French urban policy, see the empirical study by Monique Dagnaud, Le Mythe de la Qualite de la Vie et la Politique Urbaine en France, Paris: Mouton, 1976.

⁴⁵See the collection of studies presented in Colloque De Recherche Urbaine, Amenagement Urbain et Mouvements Sociaux, Paris: C.R.U., 1978.

⁴⁶See the Special Issue of the Paris-based journal Esprit, "La Democratie par l'Association?," June 1978.

⁴⁷CSCV (formerly CSF) stands for Confederation Syndicale du Cadre De Vie. For a description of its evolution and objectives, see the book by its Secretary General, Louis Caul-Futy, Ça Bouge Dans Les Quartiers, Paris: Syros, 1978.

⁴⁸See Jean Lojkine, Le Marxisme, l'Etat et la Question Urbaine, Paris:
P.U.F. 1977.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This analysis of urban mobilization in the Grands Ensembles of Paris is based on the findings of field work carried on during two years by a team of four sociologists, including the author, in the suburban communities of Sarcelles and Val d'Yerres. At the same time a study was conducted on the evolution of housing policy using secondary data and interviewing of key policy makers.*

The choice of Sarcelles and Val d'Yerres resulted from preliminary study on the tendencies of housing policy. They were the first and the last grands ensembles built in Paris and they clearly represented two poles of orientation in housing design and urban policy. The aim of the research was to compare the characteristics and outcomes of urban mobilization developing under two different realizations of a similar urban form. The process of data collection combined three observational procedures:

(1) Analysis of secondary data and written sources, including government documents; statistics and files provided by the developer (the SCIC); municipal archives; residents' associations bulletins and internal documents; local newspapers.

*The complete results of the research, including the analysis of squatters in Paris, as well as a exploratory study of 180 miscellaneous urban struggles in the entire area, have been reported in a research monograph: Manuel Castells, Eddy Cherki, Francis Godard, Dominique Mehl, Sociologie des Mouvements Sociaux Urbains: Enquête sur la Region Parisienne, Paris: C.E.M.S., 1975, 2 Volumes.

(2) Participant observation in the everyday life of the community, including neighborhood meetings, for a period of one year in each community.

(3) Fifty-six focused interviews with key informants on the grands ensembles, on Sarcelles' local life, and on Val d' Yverres social activity. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The average length of the interview was sixty-five minutes. The list of interviews included all significant local actors: management of the grand ensemble, local officials, neighborhood militants of all associations, political parties labor unions, and cultural groups. We conducted group interviews with the most important associations, to include a variety of opinions in order to cross-check the information. The list of interviews follows.

List of Interviews With Key Informers as the Basis of
the Empirical Data for the Analysis of
Urban Mobilization in the Grands Ensembles of Paris

I. Interviews on Housing Policy in Paris

- 1 Director of the "Direction Territoriale" of the SCIC (in charge of all decisions on new housing location).
- 2 Director of Land Policy, SCIC ("Gestion B" office).
- 3 Deputy Director of Public Housing (HLM), City of Paris.
- 4 Group of technicians of the Public Housing Office (HLM), City of Paris.

- 5 Director of Public Relations, SCIC.
- 6 Director of Psycho-Sociology Department, SCIC.
- 7 Director of SCIC for the "departement" (province) of Essonne (where Val d' Yverres is located).

II. Interviews on Sarcelles

- 8 Managing Director of the Grand Ensemble (SCIC).
- 9 Manager of the Young Workers Home.
- 10 Mayor of Sarcelles.
- 11 Chair of the Residents' Council.
- 12 Municipal City Councilman, former leader of the Association Sarcelloise, former elected member of the Residents' Council, member of the PCF.
- 13 Municipal Councilman, in charge with the Neighborhood Council of Sarceles-VIII.
- 14 Another City Councilman (PCF).
- 15 Leader of the Association Sarcelloise, former secretary of local Chapter of the P.S.U.
- 16 Militant of the Association Sarcelloise, former elected member of the Residents' Council. (Cross-checked with another militant of the Association Sarcelloise.)

17 Former president of the Residents' Council.

18 Group interview with leaders and militants of the local Chapter of the CNL.

19 Group interview with leaders and militants of the local chapter of "Association des Familles."

20 Group interview with the Homeowners Associations.

21 The Secretary of a homeowners association.

22 Secretary of "Parents Associations," local chapter, (Federation Armand).

23 Secretary of "Parents Associations," local chapter (Federation Cornec).

24 Secretary of the local chapter of the P.S.U.

25 Secretary of the local chapter of the P.S. (Socialist Party).

26 Secretary of the local chapter of the Socialist Youth.

27 Secretary of the local chapter of the PCF.

28 A leader of local chapter of the CGT (labor union).

29 A leader of local chapter of the CFDT (labor union).

30 Editor of Villes Nouvelles (local magazine).

31 A social worker (neighborhood "Vignes-Blanches").

III. Interviews on Val d' Yerres

- 32 Managing Director of the Grandx Ensemble (SCIC).
- 33 Manager of "La Ferme" (Socio-Cultural Center).
- 34 Chief Architect of the Val d' Yerres.
- 35 Social Worker, Boussy, (SCIC).
- 36 Social Worker, Epinay, (SCIC).
- 37 Social Worker, Quincy, (SCIC).
- 38 Municipal Social Worker, Epinay.
- 39 Group interview with leaders and militants of the GERB. (A series of three interviews.)
- 40 A militant of the GERB.
- 41 Group interview with leaders and militants of the CRI.
- 42 Group interview with leaders and militants of CNL chapter at Epinay.
- 43 Secretary of CNL Chapter at Quincy.
- 44 Secretary of "Association des familles" at Epinay.
- 45 Chair of the Residents' Council.
- 46 Secretary of Association "Culture and Leisure."
- 47 Militant of Parents' Association (Quincy).

48 Militant of Parents' Association (Epinay).

49 Militant of Association for Solidarity with Immigrant Workers.

50 Secretary of the Family Planning Association.

51 Leader of Homeowners Association at Epinay.

52 Leader of Homeowners Association at Boussy.

53 "Animateur" of the "Jardin de l'Aventure."

54 Mayor of Boussy.

55 Mayor of Quincy.

56 Mayor of Epinay.

On the basis of the material collected, three forms of analysis were undertaken for each grand ensemble:

(a) we identified the main urban problems at stake, and we carefully studied the process by which they were produced and the policies attempted to manage them.

(b) we observed each key social actor (management, associations, local governments, political parties, institutions, etc.) and analyzed its

behavior and internal structure.

(c) we identified each urban struggle, and studied it by summarizing existing information on all aspects of the struggle in a coded card for each struggle. We proceeded in such a way for twenty-one struggles in Sarcelles and twelve in Val d' Yverres.

The main results of the investigation are summarized in the preceeding pages.