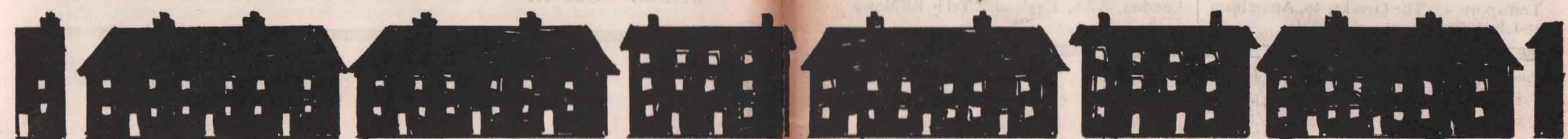


ANARCHY 83

TWO SHILLINGS OR THIRTY CENTS

TENANTS TAKE OVER



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Tenants take over

a new strategy for council tenants

COLIN WARD

OURS IS A SOCIETY IN WHICH, in every field, one group of people makes decisions, exercises control, limits choices, while the great majority have to accept these decisions, submit to this control and act within the limits of these externally imposed choices. It happens in work and leisure, politics, and education, and nowhere is it more evident than in the field of housing. This article is concerned with one particular aspect of the housing situation. It presents the arguments for a tenant take-over, for the transfer of control of municipal housing from the local authorities to tenants' associations. Although more than a quarter of the population of this country live in municipally owned houses and flats, there is not a single estate controlled by its tenants, apart from a handful of co-operative housing societies. At the moment an argument is going on between the two major political parties over the issue of the sale of council houses to tenants. From the point of view of increasing people's control of their own environment this is a sham battle, because it affects only a tiny minority of tenants. At the moment too, in consequence of the changes in the structure of local government in London, the Greater London Council is planning a phased transfer of a large proportion of its housing stock to the London Boroughs. It plans to transfer about 70,000 houses and flats in 1969. Discussion of the *control* of housing is in the air, and no time is more propitious than the present for raising the genuinely radical demand for tenant control and tenant responsibility.

The facts and opinions presented here are intended as ammunition

for such a demand.

THE MODES OF HOUSE TENURE

The ways in which householders hold their houses in Britain are limited. They are in fact more limited than in any other European country except Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Roumania.¹ The three modes of tenure in this country are owner-occupation, council tenancy and tenancy from a private landlord. The sole exception to this is, of course, ownership by a housing association, and this includes the only examples we have of co-operative housing. Statistically it is insignificant. The proportions between these three tenure groups have changed, and are changing, rapidly. For Great Britain as a whole the percentages in 1947 were²

OWNER-OCCUPIED	PUBLIC AUTHORITY RENTED	PRIVATELY RENTED
26%	13%	61%

By 1965 they had become³

44.5%	28.5%	25%
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The figures differ according to whether a dwelling or a household is being counted and according to the definitions used, and they are also different for various parts of Britain. For example, the figures for England only in 1964, counting households, were⁴

46%	26%	28%
-----	-----	-----

while another estimate, in terms of dwellings,⁵ gives

46%	33%	21%
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The proportions of council-owned dwellings varies greatly. "The Newcastle Corporation controls two out of every five of the city's houses. In Greenock, on the West Coast of Scotland, half the population live in council houses."⁵ The London Borough of Kensington has 5% council tenants, while Dagenham has 67%.⁶

The general trend is clear, and, since it concerns a commodity so basic, durable and socially important as housing, it is one of the dramatic social changes of this century. Private renting, which before the First World War accounted for over 90% of households, is declining rapidly for reasons which are well known. Just as rapidly owner-occupation and renting from local authorities is increasing. The proportionate increase of these two tenure groups depends of course, on government policy, as well as on opportunity and increasing affluence. The post-war Labour government, through building licensing and a quota system, put the emphasis on building by local authorities. The

Conservative governments of the 1950s and early 1960s changed the emphasis: "Under the Labour government only one new house in six was built for sale to a private buyer; under the Tory government two out of every three were built for sale."⁵ The policy of the present government is that by 1970 the proportions of council houses built for rent and private houses built for sale should be equal. It is pledged to stimulate and facilitate both forms of tenure. Virtually no new house building by private enterprise since the war has been for private letting. This is why privately rented property is usually synonymous with old, run-down property. The bulk of Britain's slum housing is in the privately rented sector.

Thus "the range of choice open to the family in Britain seeking a modern house is more limited than is the case almost anywhere else in Europe".¹

HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

The alternative to owner-occupation or council tenancy is to be found in the housing society movement, which has been called "Housing's Third Arm". If it is a third arm, it has so far been a regrettably feeble one, for housing associations of all kinds had by 1962 provided only 1.3% of post-war housing. Between them they control 0.7% of the total housing stock. But since the only examples of tenant co-operative housing fall into this category, it is worth examining more closely.

When building societies first came into existence as organs of working-class mutual aid at the end of the 18th century, they were remarkably like the self-build housing societies of today, and very unlike the money-lending-plus-savings-bank organisations which are the modern building societies. They consisted of groups of people who saved to buy land to house themselves, and, when the first house was completed, borrowed money on its security to build another, until all the members of the society were housed, at which point the society disbanded. In a sense they resembled the method of financing house purchase used by some groups of immigrants in this country today:

Particularly among Indians and Pakistanis, housing finance pools are found with a substantial membership—perhaps as many as 900—which meet periodically once a fortnight or once a month, and make calls of, say £10 on each member. Those who draw upon the fund thus created are subject thereafter to periodic calls until the whole amount drawn by them has been liquidated. Drawings under this system are substantial and may cover the whole purchase cost. Occasionally, West Indians operate on similar but less ambitious lines. . . . Their pooling arrangements usually only provide for the initial deposits necessary for house purchase, thus enabling them to "get off the ground".⁶

The building societies changed their character in the nineteenth century to become permanent societies, separating the people who

wished to save from those who wished to build. A new kind of society was founded in 1830, the Labourers' Friendly Society, which also changed its character and its name, to become the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes. The early efforts of poor people to improve their own housing conditions failed to expand for lack of capital. Investors then, as now, found easier ways to get rich than by financing working-class housing. This is where the Victorian philanthropists moved in, satisfied with a "modest return" on their capital.

The housing society movement since then has never lost this "charitable" emphasis, and in this respect is in marked contrast to the co-operative housing associations of several other countries. Mr. Lewis Waddilove contrasts the situation here with that in Sweden, where the movement

depended strongly on the initiative of tenants; it did not, as in the United Kingdom, become the instrument of liberal employers and philanthropists making provision for what were referred to as the "working classes". The tenants' unions of Sweden discovered that the best way of preventing the making of undue profits from a housing shortage and to raise housing standards was to build and administer their own homes. As an example, in 1923, the tenants' union of Stockholm became The Tenants' Savings and Building Society and in the following year similar movements in other towns came together to form a National Association of Housing Societies known throughout Sweden by the initials HSB. . . . A second national body for housing associations has been formed by the trade unions in Sweden concerned with the building industry. HSB remains the largest national body and its very name measures out the difference between the Swedish and the British housing association movement. In Sweden the movement's inspiration and drive come from the tenants; they save for the purpose of raising their own housing standards.

In Britain the initiative in the movement has come from philanthropists and others concerned to raise the housing standards of the "working class". Save in the "self-build" societies, little initiative rests with the occupants of the houses who are simply the tenants of the association.¹

He describes how the HSB has built up not only resources of expert advice in building, planning and finance, "but has become a centre of research, the results of which can immediately be applied in its own large-scale activities. This means that the tiniest housing co-operative in a remote township" has access to the best of advice, architectural and technical, with the result that "the standard of design, workmanship and finish are well in advance of comparable dwellings in this country. . . . So competent is the research, technical and even manufacturing organisation of HSB that municipalities have been glad to avail themselves of it. Many local authorities' housing schemes are in fact planned and executed by HSB; in some areas municipal houses are built and managed by a 'municipal company' on the directorate of which the local authority and HSB are represented".¹

In Britain, at least until the initiation in 1966 of the Co-ownership Development Society, the nearest thing we have had to HSB has been

the National Federation of Housing Societies, which gets a meagre government grant, and to which are affiliated 1,530 societies providing general family housing, old people's housing, industrial housing (sponsored by industrial firms for their employees) as well as self-build, "cost-rent" and tenant co-operative schemes. Housing societies were long ago granted the same treatment as local authorities so far as facilities for long-term loans and qualification for subsidies are concerned.

All the political parties express their support for the housing society idea, and it was amid general approval that the Housing Act of 1961 (in Section 7) made available £25 million for direct government loans at the then current rate of interest, to be administered through the National Federation to housing societies building new dwellings to be kept available for cost-rent letting, without subsidy. The Minister described his £25 million as a "pump-priming" operation, meaning that he wanted to encourage private capital to go the same way. This of course was the same pious hope that was expressed by the philanthropists a hundred years ago, and it met with the same lack of success.

Then in 1964, the government set up the Housing Corporation with Admiral Sir Caspar John at its head, and offices in Park Lane, with power to dispense another £100 million in loans to housing societies for both cost-rent and co-ownership schemes.

The results of both these attempts to stimulate the growth of housing societies has been disappointing.

The Corporation's last report showed that by the end of September 1966, 150 cost-rent projects, involving 6,932 dwellings and costing about £26.7 millions, had been approved together with a further 42 co-ownership schemes, covering more than 1,000 dwellings and costing £4.7 millions. A total of 371 housing societies, 288 of them cost-rent schemes, had been registered with the corporation.⁷ Commenting on the implications of the report, which declared that a large potential market exists for co-ownership housing, Sir Caspar John admitted that co-ownership housing had developed slowly, adding hopefully that "things have speeded up tremendously in the past six months".⁸

I have referred to the rate of expansion of the housing society movement as disappointing, but perhaps the surprising thing is that it expanded at all, as so many legal and fiscal obstacles stood in its way. In the first place the original cost-rent scheme could only benefit people with an income (five years ago) above about £1,500 a year, while such people, because of the system of taxation and tax allowances would have found freehold house purchase a better proposition. Secondly, and partly because of the difficulty of finding a legal framework—even after 100 years of the Co-operative Movement—for the concept of co-ownership, the whole system was so complex that only groups containing someone with specialist knowledge were likely even to under-

stand the scheme. The Milner Holland Report⁶ criticised the absurdity of the situation: "It seems to us that if non-profit housing associations are to make an effective contribution to the most urgent needs—and it is widely accepted that they should—then a rationalisation of the fiscal and legal provisions governing their activity is urgently needed; at present these seem to have the effect of discouraging the very associations which are equipped to give effective help in the area where it is most needed." And elsewhere the Report declared that "We have been unable to find any justification for the unfavourable tax treatment of housing associations and we conclude that unless the tax burden is lifted, the contribution to the supply of rented accommodation by housing associations will be seriously hampered."

Several steps have been taken recently which, in theory, should improve the situation—the Housing Subsidies Bill, the option mortgage scheme, the prospect of assistance from the Land Commission and of more flexible cash borrowing arrangements, but none of these in practice has so far affected the prospect for housing societies.

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND HOUSING

The Labour Party issued in 1956 a policy statement on Housing which provided, amongst other proposals, for the municipalisation of urban rented property,⁹ a policy which was quietly dropped in the 1960s (although of course, both Labour and Conservative local authorities have exercised their powers to acquire rented properties by compulsory purchase from unsatisfactory private landlords, and recent Labour Party policy statements have demanded that local authorities should use these powers more freely). The Labour Party statement was followed in 1959 by that of the Co-operative Party (debated and approved by the Bridlington Conference that year) which dissented from it in important respects. Labour had dismissed the idea of placing the management and development of municipalised dwellings in the hands of local housing associations, declaring that it was "sure that the local authorities can undertake this great new responsibility". But the Co-operative statement pointed out that, "If the local authority is to be the only landlord within a given area, there is an obvious possibility of the general application of general rules that do not permit sufficient variation to meet individual requirements". The statement expressed the hope that "local authorities will be more ready than in the past to devolute some of their management functions", and recommended the formation of a national co-operative development housing organisation to promote co-operative housing, recognising that "the Co-operative retail societies themselves cannot give the initial financial impetus to this new development in co-operation".¹⁰

The 1961 Co-operative Party policy statement reiterated the point that "very little change of policy would be necessary to give practical encouragement to the formation of co-operative housing societies"¹¹ and

went on to describe these changes. Later in the same year Harold Campbell's pamphlet *Housing Co-ops and Local Authorities* was published.¹² Here he outlined the powers which local authorities possessed under the Housing Act, 1957, to promote and assist housing associations, described the co-operative schemes which already existed, and the achievements of co-operative housing movements in Sweden, Denmark and the United States, and set out the needs in this country: a powerful promotional organisation, persuasion of local authorities, mobilisation of financial resources, and changes in the legal structure. In 1966 the Co-ownership Development Society was set up and has already fostered five co-operative housing societies, with Mr. Campbell as its chairman. In April 1967 he was appointed to the board of the Housing Corporation. Advocates of co-operative housing who have waited so long for the movement to get off the ground will hope that this appointment will bear fruit. What is missing is the demand from below.

CHANGING THE COUNCIL ESTATE

But however long it takes to develop a co-operative housing movement in this country, must we necessarily assume that the existing municipal housing estates, the homes of well over a quarter of the population, must continue to be administered paternalistically from above as though the vast social changes of the post-war world had not taken place? The Parker Morris Committee, drawing up new standards for housing, did not think so, reminding us that "It must be admitted that many other European countries reach a far higher standard in their estate layout than we do, very largely through the use of housing associations, which take full responsibility for both the initial landscaping and its maintenance".²³ And the Central Housing Advisory Committee reminded local authorities that "tenants today are much more representative of the community as a whole and are, for the most part, independent, reliable citizens who no longer require the support and guidance which was often thought to be necessary in the past. *Local authorities must recognise that this is a major social change which is likely to become more marked in the years ahead.*"¹⁷ (The Committee's italics.)

The Committee's report went on: "To think of the tenants of today as though their circumstances and needs are the same as those of tenants of a generation ago would be unreal. Similarly, to expect methods of management designed to meet the needs of tenants in the 1930s to be suitable for those of the 1950s or 1970s would, we think, be quite wrong. . . ." But what of the tenants of the 1960s? Has there been a change in the attitudes of housing management? It would be difficult to find evidence for this.

The time is ripe for change. But change of what kind? I believe

that it should be a radical change to tenant control, and several of our foremost authorities on housing share this opinion. Mr. Waddilove,¹ for example, makes the same unfavourable comparison as did the Parker Morris Committee, between the appearance of housing estates in this country and on the Continent, and draws the same conclusion:

The visitor to housing estates on the Continent comments most often on the attractiveness of their layout, the care with which common land is cultivated, and the harmony of external decoration. The claim of the co-operative association is that it combines the sense of ownership and the security of tenure of the owner-occupied house with an equally strong sense of responsibility for, and interest in, the neighbourhood as a whole. Moreover it does this as a by-product of its normal organisation; in Britain in new estates we have attempted to achieve the same result by all kinds of artificial stimuli to neighbourhood responsibility.

The sense of responsibility comes from *being* responsible, and people can only *be* responsible for their own lives and their own environment if they are in control of it. Similarly Professor Donnison declares:²¹

... we need a system that will provide adequate housing of various types with complete security of tenure. Down payments should be negligible but subsequent payments may well be higher than council rents. The occupier should be given responsibility and incentives for maintaining and improving his own house, but should be insured against the costs of major repairs. Some body responsible to the occupiers themselves should retain a continuing interest in the character and development of the immediate neighbourhood and might provide open space and other shared amenities for its residents. In fact a way must be found to continue the advantages of owner-occupation and tenancy, both in new housing and in existing property.

The points which require emphasis in his conclusions are that the overall body should be responsible *to the occupiers themselves* and that it is not enough to develop this new kind of tenure for future application: it must be applied to *existing property*.

Mr. J. B. Cullingworth raises similar questions, in fact a whole series of them:²⁶

Could not tenants be given a greater degree of responsibility for the upkeep of their houses and, probably more important, for the general appearance and amenities of housing estates? There is a growing discussion of the value of "citizen-participation" in urban renewal in the rehabilitation of "twilight areas". Is not a similar line possible with council housing estates? Surely it is not only owner-occupiers who are hit by the "do-it-yourself revolution" and who have a real concern for their houses and the environment in which they live. More fundamentally, why do we need council housing? If it is a question of ensuring that low-income families can obtain good housing at a price which they can afford, could not this be achieved by a system of family housing allowances? If it is a question of ensuring that sufficient houses are actually built, could not local authorities simply confine their attention to housebuilding and hand over the completed houses to associations of tenants, housing co-operatives, housing societies, or even (with the aid of generous mortgage facilities) to individual families? A "reserve" of houses could be kept for special needs, but it need not be on the vast scale of today.

With his reference to housing allowances as an alternative to manipulating the rents of low-income families, and to the sale of council houses to individual tenants, Mr. Cullingworth is raising issues which I have to discuss elsewhere, but he is clearly among those who see a better future in self-management than in municipal management.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TENANTHOOD

Psychological generalisations about whole groups of people are bound to be meaningless, especially when the group to which a person belongs has been selected by such a variety of factors, most of them quite outside those of individual personality, as the choice of house tenure. In fact, of course, for most people it is not a matter of choice but of grabbing whatever opportunity has been theirs, of getting a roof over their heads.

Yet the generalisations are made. "Property owners," says Ferdynand Zweig,²⁵ "often struck me as a brighter, more daring and enterprising breed than the rest. . . . I often asked how people felt when they became house-owners. . . . The overwhelming majority felt deeply about it," and the words which came to their lips were satisfaction, self-confidence, freedom, independence. And James Tucker, describing the effects of segregation by house tenure and the frightening animosities which exist between owner-occupiers and council tenants,²⁸ feels able to isolate certain characteristics of council tenants:

Now, what of the people? There are two dominant characteristics, one at least of which I cannot claim to be the first to have noticed. It is unneighbourliness, often resulting in loneliness; the other seems to be based on an acceptance of the notion that people in council houses have failed, haven't quite made it, and is frequently expressed as a frustrated desire to buy a house off the estate.

Many council tenants speak with gentle pride of how little they have to do with people living near them. . . . In some measure it may be a means of self-protection against neighbours not considered up to the social mark. But, more important, it is a defensive assertion against the low social standing of estates: "Look! We can be as unfriendly as anybody." People ape what they assume to be superior ways of behaving; suburban ways, for instance. It is tragic that it should be so and leads to great unhappiness. . . .

In so far as we may consider the generalisations to be valid, we can see that they arise from the *social* situations in which people find themselves. The walls or fences which in a number of notorious instances have been built to separate privately-owned from council-owned sections of the same estate are an extreme manifestation of ordinary English snobbery, but they make it devastatingly clear to the more vulnerable kind of municipal tenant that in the eyes of millions of his fellow-countrymen he is a second-class citizen. The way in which his relationship with his landlord intensifies this feeling has been made clear by Stanley Alderson:²⁴

... the usual balance of power between landlord and tenant is everywhere upset by the condition of housing shortage. But the problems

are much more acute in council tenancy. It is not only that the council tenant is even less free to move than the private tenant. The private tenant can at least hate his landlord for taking advantage of the conditions of shortage for his own financial gain. The council tenant knows that he is fortunate in having his house, and feels that he has been done a favour. The local authority which is his landlord never does anything for its own financial gain. It always acts in its wisdom for its tenants' own advantage. In the long run, power employed paternistically provokes far greater resentment than power employed selfishly or even antagonistically. Because there is no satisfactory outlet for it, the resentment accumulates. . . .

Worse still, every attempt to rationalise rent policy serves to exacerbate this paternalistic relationship, for Mr. Alderson goes on:

It is often said of industrial strikes over wages that their real cause is repressed resentment deriving from day-to-day industrial relationships. Similarly the rent strikes that followed the introduction of differential rent schemes must have given release to repressed resentment deriving from landlord-tenant relations. The protests against a means test were not merely rationalisations of a reluctance to pay higher rents. Differential rents were resented because they foisted on the local authorities the ultimate paternalist responsibility of deciding how much pocket money their tenants should be allowed to keep. Local authorities deserve sympathy for their reluctance to exercise this responsibility. It is as imperative that they should be relieved of it as that council tenants who can afford to should pay economic rents. The council tenant who needs financial assistance should receive it through some other organ of the state, established to assist private tenants and owner-occupiers as well. He could then claim his assistance without loss of dignity, and he would always pay his full rent to his landlord. Equally his landlord would always be entitled to claim it from him.

We need to find a system of tenure which changes this psychology of dependency for one of independence. One which, as Harold Campbell puts it, "combines private enterprise and mutual aid in a unique form of social ownership which puts a premium on personal responsibility and individual initiative".¹⁰

COULD TENANTS MANAGE TO MANAGE THEMSELVES?

The obvious nucleus of a tenants' co-operative is the tenants' association. Is there evidence that associations of this kind can bear the weight of continuous organisational responsibility? Several students of this kind of association would doubt it, citing Ruth Durant's famous study of "Watling" and other more recent examples where, on the new estate, "there is a familiar pattern of initial loneliness followed by unity against the outside world, giving rise to an agitational Residents' Association. This achieves its task and most of the inhabitants settle down to a home-centred but small group-oriented, social life".¹³ Others have developed a "phase theory" of the life of tenants' associations:

In the first phase, the association played mainly a representative role, negotiating with the local authority for essential services and organising large-scale socials and protest meetings. In the second it became mainly a constructive organisation, fully occupied in building a community centre. In the third phase the centre's finances were placed on a firm foundation; and in the fourth, popular wishes were discovered through a process of trial and error. In the fifth period, short-run equilibrium was reached: the activities of the centre followed a routine pattern. This was the path of evolution of the most successful centre studied; the others failed to make such rapid adjustments, and lost most of their membership.¹⁴

John Hayes, on the other hand, emphasises that it cannot be said that tenants' associations are merely "transitory bodies formed for one objective only and then fading away". On the contrary, "Once established they tend to last, and to concentrate on welfare work for their neighbourhood. Of fifty-eight groups affiliated to the London Standing Conference of Housing Estate Community Groups in 1962, one had been in existence for forty-six years, twenty have existed for fourteen years, eighteen for from five to ten years, sixteen for from one to five years, and three were new in 1962. Evidence of this sort should help to disprove the contention that the groups lack stability".¹⁵ Similarly, Gerry Williams, youth adviser to the London group of associations, writing of "the quite spontaneous development, after the Second World War, on the growing number of council housing estates, of Tenants' Associations", emphasises that, "Contrary to the general opinion, the great number of these autonomous, self-formed organisations are not 'grievance' bodies, but non-political associations formed for the purpose of creating some sense of community and neighbourliness amongst the uprooted in the often drab new areas of houses and flats that are such a characteristic part of post-war Britain".¹⁶

Testifying to the value of such associations, the Central Housing Advisory Committee reported that, "The attitude of local authorities towards tenants' associations tends to vary according to the circumstances in which an association has sprung up. Naturally the main purpose of most associations is to watch over the interests of the tenant. Their approach may differ widely, some starting with the belief that the interests of tenant and landlord are inevitably opposed. We believe, however, that whatever the starting point, *the wise course for the local authority is to treat associations as responsible bodies and seek to secure their confidence and co-operation . . .*"¹⁷ (the Committee's italics).

Describing the activities of the associations, Mr. Hayes notes that, "Their objects are usually threefold; to encourage good neighbourliness; and to provide facilities for recreational activities; and to work for the benefit of the residents generally. Usually their method is to organise social activities first, and later to serve as a consultative committee for the estate, acting as a link with housing management for the discussion of common problems of living on the estate. The advantage of having such a representative group to consult as a 'consumer council' has only slowly been recognised by housing managers."¹⁵

Since, I am in fact, advocating that tenants' associations should evolve from this consultative status to that of actual control, I should perhaps cite a contradictory opinion. Messrs. Morris and Moge, in *The Sociology of Housing* observe that,

Councils are apt to be cautious in granting self-government to their tenants, and this is to some extent justified by the tenants' diversity and inexperience. Others feel that paternal watchfulness and control by the local authority can easily outgrow the bounds of reason; and give only the minimum of tenancy conditions and unsought advice. This represents the other extreme from paternalism: it assumes such a strong relationship that tenants will feel free to make any requests to the local authority. It

gives tenants' associations much more responsibility than they are structured to carry. They lack the power to discipline their own members, and cannot therefore bargain successfully or act firmly on their members' behalf. To find a balance between paternalism and *laissez-faire* requires skill; for tenants' associations will tend to be effectively suppressed if either extreme policy is adopted.¹⁸

But has anyone ever tried giving *real* responsibilities to tenants' associations? Apart from the handful of examples of co-operative co-partnership housing associations, there is very little evidence to draw upon. There is certainly a lesson to learn from one particular field of private enterprise housing. The general standard of design in speculative house-building is abysmally low, but the outstanding exceptions in post-war private development have been in the work of Span Developments Ltd. and Wates Ltd. Wates arrange for the shared facilities of their estates to be the responsibility of a management company composed of the residents themselves, which, they claim, "also allows people to get to know and help each other (in matters like baby-sitting for example) without intruding into each other's essential privacy". And in the Span developments there has been developed a method of residents' control, described by the architect Eric Lyons as a "special technique of leasehold purchase, which is effecting a quiet revolution in property ownership" and he claims for the system that

. . . It has solved the old problem of maintenance of common spaces and structures, and also involves each resident in the autonomous Residents' Society which runs each estate. . . . The scheme which has a Residents' Society very carefully formed on a non-profit-making basis under the Friendly Societies Acts . . . is a method of guaranteeing the permanent maintenance of the building, and not only the building fabric, but the gardens and general amenities. It is also of singular benefit in involving each individual in the idea, each person who lives there. That seems to be socially a tremendous thing.

. . . As far as I am concerned, it does not affect me whether it is leasehold or not. The important thing is that the Residents' Societies are in charge legally and formally. They have their own committees and take an active part. If someone's child starts digging up the lawn, someone will want to know why. Everyone has a stake in the issue. . . .¹⁹

His last sentence explains why it is reasonable to expect that *genuine* control by tenants' co-operatives would be successful. To suggest that the middle-class residents of Span estates have some quality which is lacking in council house tenants, apart from larger incomes, is to deny the whole edifice of mutual aid organisation which the working class has built up in the past. (In fact, a resident of one Span development at Blackheath remarked that "We have all the advantages without the disadvantages of a working class district. The estate has achieved a high degree of neighbourliness."²⁰)

And if it is really true that tenant control would give tenants' associations more responsibility than they are "structured to carry", or that the tenants' diversity and inexperience would make it impossible, how are we to explain the success of the extreme case which Mr. Waddilove reports from Norway?

A pre-war municipal estate near Oslo was transferred over a period from the ownership of the local authority to the ownership of associations

of the tenants themselves. It has been one of the most difficult problems to the local authority; its standards were low, its appearance unpleasant, and there was great resistance to increases in rents to a reasonable level. A series of meetings patiently arranged by the housing manager ultimately resulted in the acceptance by the tenants of membership in co-operatives which, on favourable terms, took over the ownership of the property from the local authority. Today it is transformed. The members have cared for their own property and by corporate action have ensured that others have done so in a way that they failed to do when it was in public ownership; they have charged themselves "fees for occupation" higher than the rents proposed by the municipality at which they protested so vigorously. This experience so impressed the authority that it decided in principle to transfer all its post-war estates similarly to the ownership of tenant co-operatives and to base its housing policy on this principle.¹

ONE BY ONE OR ALL TOGETHER

Local authorities have been at liberty to sell their houses for at least ten years, but it is only very recently that this has become a "hot" political issue: since Birmingham Corporation began selling council houses in large numbers last year. The issue is obviously going to be bandied about in future local and national elections, just as it was in the municipal elections in 1967 when London and other big cities changed their political masters.

What proportion of council tenants would like to buy the houses they occupy, and are financially able to do so? It is hard to make an estimate. Several years ago Ferdynand Zweig observed that "The tendency to consider house property as something worth having and struggling for, something which gives one strength and self-confidence and social standing, appears to be spreading among the working classes. I have no figures to offer here but I think that the working classes may be divided into three main groups, numerically not very far apart. One group tries to acquire property; the second does not think about house property at all, as it is beyond its possibilities and its ken; the third group rejects the acquisition of house property outright as undesirable and even pernicious for the working man".²⁵ On the other hand, James Tucker noted in 1966 that

It is unusual, though that is all, to come across council tenants who would not prefer to be owner-occupiers, possibly of council-built property, but more often of a house away from municipal estates. It would be wild to suggest that all those who want to go are seeking an escape from council housing because its social rating is low. More simply, property appreciates and many council tenants feel they are missing something: their objections are not to renting council property but to renting. Yet it is worth noticing that a lot of council tenants regard those who have moved off to their own houses as having taken a leap upward in social standing. The other side of that thought can only be shame or frustration or aggressiveness at finding themselves left behind.²⁸

Commenting on the actual response of tenants in Birmingham and Reading to offers from the council of the chance to buy their houses, Brian Lapping (*The Guardian*, 15.5.67) says, "What is surprising is how few people in council houses have taken the chance to buy them. Reading's 1,500 have taken five years. In Birmingham so far only 2½% of those offered the chance have bought. Nobody knows why the response rate has been low. Perhaps it is because of the freeze, perhaps because most council tenants don't like their homes enough to want to

own them." And Clive Branson (*Daily Mail*, 11.10.67) remarks, "My poll among tenants who are thinking of buying their council homes showed that many had only the haziest idea what the step meant. They had not thought of buying a house until approached by the council." Harry Brack (*Evening Standard*, 23.5.67) asks, "What lies behind this poor response? and he answers, "Many tenants simply cannot afford to go in for owner occupation. For others, a home on a private estate is a status symbol, and an ageing council house is not." Among tenants explaining their reasons for opting to buy their council houses, many replied in similar words to those of Mr. Ronald Atkins, "It seemed that the rents were going up regularly every 12 months or two years. One year they went up twelve bob. More or less, we wanted to buy the house on account of that. We didn't think the rent was all that excessive because it's a very good house, but from what we could see, the rent would eventually beat what we pay for buying it. It's not only that, but you feel more inclined to do things to make the house better for yourself and you feel more secure."

As with most issues connected with housing, opinions on the sale of council housing have polarised on political lines. This applies even to opinions on the success or failure of the campaign to sell them. Thus at the Scarborough Conference of the Labour Party, Mr. Greenwood, Minister of Housing, defending his policy of disagreeing but not intervening, declared that "The rate of sale is falling: it is lower today than a year ago" (*Guardian*, 3.10.67), while on the other hand Mr. Horace Cutler, the new Conservative chairman of the Greater London Council's Housing Committee, claims that "There has been a fantastic response to the GLC's 'buy your own home' scheme for council tenants". Both in Birmingham and London, the Councils do not propose to offer to tenants more than 10% of their houses. The rate of response in London is certainly higher than in Birmingham, probably about 10% of tenants to whom the offer has been made have started negotiating. If we assume that the same figure would apply to the 90% of tenants who have not been offered the chance, this would mean that about one in a hundred of council tenants feels able or anxious to buy his house. When you look at it in this light, it is hard to see what the fuss is about.

The arguments which have been used by the Labour Party in opposition to the sale of council houses have hardly been of a kind to convince the uncommitted. It is suggested that the sale of houses to tenants would have the effect of depriving people waiting on the councils' lists, but in fact these houses would be occupied as tenants by the would-be purchasers in any case. (The actual number of occupied council dwellings which fall vacant in London is only 1½ to 2% a year.) It is extraordinary that in the public discussion of this issue, no one has made the point that transfer of ownership collectively to a tenants' association is infinitely preferable to the selling of a small number of odd houses whose tenants happen to be ready and willing to buy them, one by one. This could be an alternative more attractive both to the tenant and to the council.

It would extend the benefits of independence much more widely.

It would avoid setting up yet another social barrier on estates, between those who have bought and those who still pay rent. It would enable public spaces to be collectively maintained. It would create, in Mr. Campbell's words, "a sense of belonging and of shared responsibility (rarely to be found on a municipal housing estate or among suburban owner-occupiers) which makes for mutual respect, out of which a healthy society naturally grows".

There is no point in denying (like many house-owning Labour politicians have) that it is better to be an owner-occupier than a council tenant. What wants emphasising is that it is better than either to be a member of a community.

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Housing management, as undertaken by local authorities under the Housing Acts, includes all the work involved in:

1. advice on the design and layout of estates from the management point of view;
2. the study of housing needs in the borough or district;
3. the selection of tenants;
4. the allocation of accommodation;
5. the fixing of rents and the levying of occupation charges;
6. the collection of, and the accounting for, rents, rates and other charges due from tenants;
7. the upkeep, maintenance and repair of houses and estates, the adaptation, improvement and conversion of properties;
8. the provision of caretaking services and the operation of special estate services (laundries, lifts, community centres, clubrooms, etc.);
9. the enforcement of tenancy conditions, the maintenance of good order, the care of elderly, infirm, and unsatisfactory tenants.

If an estate were *taken over* by a tenant co-operative, the first two of these functions would not be its concern. (Though, of course, if the normal means of providing housing became by way of housing societies rather than by way of local authorities, they would become everybody's concern.) We have therefore to consider how a co-operative might manage items 3 to 9.

Selection of Tenants: Local authorities vary enormously in their selection criteria. (See for example Jane Morton: "The Council House Raffle", *New Society*, 23.11.67.) The one basic principle is that allocation and selection is based on need rather than merit. But the "weighting" of various kinds of need is bound to be arbitrary, and there is no reason to suppose that a committee of tenants, selecting a candidate to fill a vacancy, would have any less valid a conception of fairness than the housing department's officials. However, some other criteria usually ignored in council selection may, quite legitimately be adopted. Morris and Mogey¹⁸ note that with the usual selection methods "legitimate public or group interests may be largely ignored" and mention the findings of Young and Willmott on the break-up of the extended family through housing policy. "Experience in establishing co-operative com-

munities has shown that success requires the careful selection of applicants on grounds other than immediate need; this is also true to a smaller extent of local authority housing schemes."

Allocation: Since we are considering existing estates where vacancies occur one by one, problems of allocation scarcely arise, and when they do, once again, there is no reason to suppose that the sense of fair play of a tenants' co-operative is any less developed than that of the housing manager. The swapping of dwellings would probably be easier to arrange between members of a co-operative than through the bureaucracy of housing management.

Rents: Few people would deny that the whole field of payment for housing is in an absurd situation, and that if subsidies are to be made (including the concealed subsidy of tax concessions for owner-occupiers) it would be more equitable to subsidise families rather than subsidise particular dwellings. Readers will readily agree that social welfare is no substitute for social justice, but that until we can achieve the latter we have to utilise the former. I assume therefore that after a transfer from municipal to co-operative control, the co-operative would levy rent on its members in relation to its commitments and that subsidies for members would be obtained through the machinery of social welfare rather than through that of housing. We do not want the ability to pay an economic rent to be the criterion of membership of a housing co-operative, while at the same time we know that housing subsidies today do not reach those whose need for them is greatest.

Collection and Accountancy: A small co-operative might provide these services for itself, a large one might pay for them to be professionally provided.

Upkeep and Maintenance: This is likely to be a much less expensive proposition for a co-operative than for a council's maintenance department. Mr. Campbell notes in his pamphlet that the members of housing co-operatives "have a keen interest in maintaining their homes in good repair and indeed, constantly to improve them". The co-operative policy statement on Social Ownership¹¹ remarked that "We see no reason why many councils should not contract with small producer co-operatives for at least the maintenance of their properties." Exactly the same thing applies to housing co-operatives.

Communal Services: A real community would probably provide these services on a voluntary rota basis. If in practice it was unable to do this, it could pay for them, utilising the services of its elderly or teenage members.

Good Order: Any housing manager will tell you of his impotence in the face of anti-social behaviour on estates. Good order comes from good community relationships which are far more likely under conditions of tenant responsibility than external responsibility.

Social Welfare: Opinions within the world of housing management differ greatly as to the extent to which social welfare is a housing responsibility. It is certain however that the members of a well-developed tenants' association will see it as a community responsibility. "We are our own social workers," explained a member of one of the

71 affiliated groups of the Association of London Housing Estates (*The Times*, 21.6.1967).

Cost of Management: The costs of housing management vary greatly from one authority to another. Cullingworth²⁶ gives a range of from £1 6s. to £23 2s. per year per dwelling. The organisation and methods committee which studied housing management in the London boroughs,²⁷ suggested that the appropriate staffing of an housing management department controlling 4,000 dwellings might be 25 people, for 8,000 dwellings 46 people, and for 15,000 dwellings 76 people. These figures are for office staff only and they represent 80% of the present London averages. There is every reason to suppose that the administrative costs of self-management would be very much lower than of council management. For specialist services a tenant co-operative could subscribe to and use the expertise of a central body of the same kind that is so necessary for a housing society starting from scratch. And in the Co-ownership Development Society we have a possible nucleus for such a body.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

The statutory basis of a local authority's right to sell its council houses is Section 104 of the Housing Act, 1957, and the only limitation on this is the need for the consent of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, a consent which in no instance so far has ever been refused. The transfer of an estate to a co-operative of its tenants, would, it seems to me, be covered by this provision.

In London, under Section 23(3) of the London Government Act, 1963, the Minister has power by order, to provide for the transfer to a housing association of any housing accommodation belonging to the Greater London Council or the Council of a London borough provided, in the latter case, that it is outside the borough.

The financial arrangement for the take-over should probably be based on the experience of the existing co-operative housing societies. It might be for instance that the co-operative is advanced a mortgage by the council (the price agreed being based on the members' status as sitting tenants) for the whole or a part of the purchase price, any other loan being arranged through the Co-ownership Development Society, and each member contributing to a share liability which might in the first instance be nominal.

Or, on the other hand, and if the arrangement is to be made more attractive to members than individual house ownership, some arrangement must be made for a tenant, on moving out, to receive his share of the appreciation of the property. Mrs. Wallis, who acted as arbitrator for a co-operative self-build housing society told the National Federation how this was done in her society:

We took the value of the house from the time the man entered it until the time when he was compelled to leave due to his job having been changed. We did deem that the money and the labour which he had put into that shell, if you like, to improve it quite rightly should be his profit. We felt that it was his own personal effort, and not that of the association or the group.

However, the other profit which was made over and above that second valuation was divided between that man and his housing association. We felt, again, that part of that extra money was due to the man for his goodwill (the goodwill which he put into the association by being a good member), and he was entitled to something for his labour. We felt that some of it was due to the members for their goodwill as far as he was concerned. We came to a very happy and amicable arrangement. . . . We have never had a squabble. We have never had an argument over the settlement at all.²⁹

Here of course the house was actually sold, but the principle can be adapted to a situation where the tenant is rewarded but the tenancy reverts to the society.

HOW AND HOW SOON?

The tenant take-over of municipal housing is one of those marvellous ideas that is dormant because no one is taking the trouble to propagate it, but which could catch like wildfire once the principle is established in people's minds. We have to consider the ways of spreading it.

Firstly it should be spread in those *ad hoc* tenants' committees which spring up when the councils announce rent rises. Their immediate aim may be to resist this or that item of council policy, but what is their ultimate aim? Surely a tenant take-over is the only logical one. Then it should be spread through tenants' and community associations, to persuade the members that the experience they have gained of community organisation could really flourish and grow in community control. Then it should be spread through the co-operative movement. Millions of council tenants are co-op members, millions of co-op members are council tenants. They need to be convinced that co-operative ownership and control of housing is really much more important than a derisory dividend on retail purchases, which is all the co-op means in most of their lives today. Then it should be spread to members of housing committees, some of whom will readily connect their own experience of the absurdities of housing policy with the advantages to be found in tenant control. Once the idea is being seriously discussed, the ordinary media of communications will spread it, criticise it, appraise it. The first thing is to get it on the agenda of all these bodies.

Then we need study of the financial and legal problems. If there were a genuine and militant upsurge of demand from below, these would rapidly follow to event, but it would be helpful to find out where the difficulties lie, and how they might be resolved, from the experience of bodies like the Co-ownership Development Society and the National Federation of Housing Societies and of the handful of existing housing co-operatives.

Finally we need a working example, a pilot project, to prove to others that it is possible. It may not be in present circumstances a universal solution, it may not be applicable everywhere. But Britain has a higher proportion of municipally owned dwellings than any other Western country. Surely there is room somewhere for an experiment in responsible citizenship, which is what is implied in the transfer of housing from municipal government to self-government.

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"It is curious that left-wing councils, whose members can hardly be unaware of the advantages of co-operative systems, still maintain a rigidly paternalistic attitude to housing management."

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, November 1967

Homeless in Wandsworth

PATRICIA GOLDACRE

ON 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1967, WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL, a Labour Council, sent an astonishing letter to the homeless families living in its temporary accommodation (Durham Buildings and Nightingale Square). The letter demanded that the families vacate this accommodation as soon as possible and "certainly within the next nine months". The finding of alternative accommodation, said the letter, was the responsibility entirely of the families themselves. They had already been told that the Council would not rehouse them, said the letter, and they were being informed officially that they would not be permitted to remain in the Council's welfare accommodation for longer than nine months, that is, after June 1968.

The Chairman of the Welfare Committee (a strange name for a committee that sent such a letter) stated in the press that the letter was written after great thought as an attempt to discourage homelessness in anyone who might be thinking of becoming homeless as a way of obtaining a council flat; to present those families who were already homeless with "an adventure and a challenge"; and that the Council believed that all the families were likely to be able to find other accommodation within the next nine months but that many of the men were unemployed, were in arrears with their rent and were thought not to be *trying* to help themselves.

Leaving this airy fairy-ness on one side for the moment, let us look at the facts. Durham Buildings is typical of a number of similar buildings provided for homeless families as temporary accommodation. There is another equally grim and unhygienic place in Wandsworth itself—Battersea Bridge Buildings—and it is not clear why the families there were not similarly favoured with a letter placing a time limit on their stay. For the last few years these places have been run by the London Boroughs and before that they were run by the LCC. For

PATRICIA GOLDACRE, of Wandsworth Community Workshop has been active in the defence of the Durham Buildings Tenants.

generations they have been known as ghettos: that's where you go when you're down and out, you can't sink any lower than that. People in the locality know the Durham Buildings families, at school, in the play spaces, in the shops where no one is given H.P. if he lives in Durham Buildings. There is no bathroom for 90 families. Each flat has one cold tap, one electric power point and a lavatory which is reached by going through the flat and out onto a balcony overlooking the yard. The little children who play down in the yard pee on the stairs rather than climb perhaps four floors and there is a pervading smell of urine in the Buildings. Broken windows are not mended, on the stairs they are left gaping and in front door panels they are stuck over with paper and cardboard. Factories on both sides and behind the yard pour smoke, dust and steam into the Buildings. The heavy traffic on York Road, Battersea, pours petrol fumes. If a child leaves school and gets a job on reaching the age of 15, pressure is brought to bear by the Council to get the child to leave home and find lodgings outside the Buildings. Some of these teenagers sneak back in at night to be near their families. When families become homeless, they are not allowed to bring any of their own furniture with them and this means either selling it all or paying for storage indefinitely. In the words of one mother, "It definitely marks you and you begin to give up. It drags you down with it. There's a woman here who drinks methylated spirits. She was normal once. She's been here *seven* years and has had three children more since she came, making seven. One woman here has lost two babies with lung trouble in the first few months. Her doctor said she shouldn't go on living here. I've been here ten months and I was beginning to break. I think I would have if it hadn't been for my doctor. He's an angel and he doesn't seem ever to *mind* coming here to visit my baby." The Council midwives, who are normally keen for home confinements, say that they will not undertake confinements in Durham Buildings because this Council accommodation is too sub-standard. In spite of all this, most families would prefer to live in the Buildings than to live in Nightingale Square.

Nightingale Square is hygienic and supervised. This means that you have to be in at 11 o'clock every night. If you have visitors, they are supposed to report first to the Supervisor. All letters are delivered to the office and are given out at the pleasure of the Supervisor. At 9 o'clock every morning all flats are inspected to see that beds have been made and swept under. At any time you may be visited by the Supervisor. There is no privacy and families would rather be in smelly Durham Buildings, where at least there is some privacy, they say. In Nightingale Square one is institutionalised, depersonalised and humiliated. A young man complained bitterly on behalf of his wife: "My wife has had two brain operations and the doctor said that she mustn't live upstairs because of her dizzy spells. She's just come out of the nerve hospital. I told the Welfare Officer this because we were put up on the second floor. The Welfare Officer said, 'Nerves? Hundreds of people have nerves.' She put us one floor down onto the first floor.

I've tried to telephone the Medical Officer but I can't ever get hold of him." Nightingale Square is supposed to be just a reception place, but this family with two children had been there three months.

All the families are different and have become homeless for a variety of reasons—e.g. loss of employment, or sickness, so that they could not keep up with payments of rent. Some of the men have been in prison, some of the women are without husbands. The frightening thing is that homelessness is something which could easily happen to any ordinary person—a venture that fails, an eviction under the Rent Act. Few of the families have less than three children. Many have four, five or six. Several have eight or nine and one has eleven. All received the same tough-line letter from the Council. A mother of four children said, "I went to the office and signed for my letter as we were all told to do. When I got upstairs and opened it I could have fallen through the floor. How am I going to find somewhere to live with four children? I'm here through no fault of my own and I feel that a terrible injustice has been done against me. It's just impossible for most of the families here to find anywhere else to live or they would have done so. The Council is asking us to do in nine months what they have failed to do in 35 years." One mother took an overdose of sleeping pills in a suicide attempt. Another told me that her daughter had now become enuretic during the day as well as at night. . . . "They can't help hearing us talk and none of us knows what's going to happen to us all. Meanwhile I just can't cope with the washing with one electric point, three children and a baby."

The logical conclusion at the end of nine months was that those families who had not found alternative accommodation (and most of them felt hopeless about that), would be evicted and that their children would then be taken into care. The children and parents suffered six weeks of anxiety and apprehension about this before the Chairman of the Welfare Committee, in a television interview with me, was stung into a statement: "The Council has never said that it would take the children into care. It is not the policy of the Council to break up families." This is as far as the Council will go, but most of the families are assuming that this policy applies to them and that the Council has pledged itself not to take the children away. Ron Bailey of *Solidarity* (fresh from victories at King Hill and Abridge) has helped the families to form a Tenants' Association which has held meetings and protest marches, and has tried to have the issue discussed at a Council meeting. It seems completely cowardly and shameful that the new policy of the Welfare Committee was not even mentioned in its report to the Council, and no Councillor, either Labour or Conservative, raised the subject. They had all had a letter from the Tenants' Association asking them to do so. Presumably the Conservatives did not care to and the Labour members had been forbidden to by their Party Whips.

The Council is urging families to move out of London to the new towns. There are a few young couples who say that they would like to,

but that they have not been able to line up both work and a home in a new town, although they have been trying to for years. There are others who say, "We wouldn't be welcome in a new town, coming from Durham Buildings," or "We've only just managed to find stable employment here. Why should we now be made to move out?" They feel that the Council is seeking to solve its own problems by trying to deport them from the Borough. A new town does not allure very insecure and deprived families—familiarity is what they want. One wife said, "I feel that we who have lived here for 35 years are being made to move out of Wandsworth and the coloureds are moving in." Meanwhile, every Sunday since the first protest march, coaches have been sent by the Council to Durham Buildings and Nightingale Square to take the men out for the day to see a new town.

There is no doubt that the Councillors concerned are now quite frightened at the hornets' nest which they have stirred up. Some of the men in Durham Buildings are very angry and are violent in their threats to individuals. To add to their sense of persecution, families who have had press publicity have received poison pen letters—"Stop making children. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

How could such a stupid, distressing situation arise. It is certain that there is a wide gap in knowledge and understanding between the families and the Councillors. Families are called grandly to the Town Hall for interviews, from time to time, and the Welfare has fat dossiers on them all, based in part on reports made by the Welfare Officers of the Buildings and the Supervisor of Nightingale Square. At one such interview a mother who was working part-time was asked, "Why don't you take a full-time job?". Councillors do not seem often to find time to go and see the accommodation for which they are responsible or to talk to the people whose fates they hold in their hands. The families I spoke to did not know the names of any of the Councillors and said that no one had ever been near them since the day they moved in and that they had never seen anyone from the Council in the Buildings. A deputation of three of the husbands was received at the Town Hall after the sending of the letter of 25th September—*only* three were allowed—and they were received by fifteen Councillors armed with thick files on the families. One was asked, "Are you working? No? Unemployed? What are you talking for then?" He had been offered a job by the Council as a roadsweeper but had turned it down because he said it was bad enough living in Durham Buildings without sweeping the streets as well.

Recently the Wandsworth Borough Council spent over £10,000 putting showers into a sports' club which is used once a week. Last year they sought £6,000 for new regalia for themselves. For far less than either of these sums they could have put downstairs public lavatories, a bathhouse and a drying room in the yard of Durham Buildings. It does not seem to occur to them that even as temporary housing such places are a national disgrace and are so awful that no one would live

there by choice, that if you give people conditions as disgusting as Durham Buildings to live in, they sink to the level where they feel they cannot do anything and become hopeless and apathetic. The Council's letter to these families was like threatening a man on a raft on the high seas that if he does not find an island soon you will take away his raft.

This contrasts strangely with the advice given to local authorities by the Minister of Health, the Home Secretary and the Minister of Housing and Local Government in a joint circular dated 26th September: "In many areas, although a family may have to spend a considerable time in interim accommodation, they are helped to find permanent accommodation of one kind or another, if they cannot make their own arrangements. Either the social service departments assist them in finding suitable private housing, or they are given a tenancy by the housing authority or department. Ministers commend this practice, and consider that once a family have been given temporary accommodation because they are homeless they should not, except for special reasons, be compelled to leave unless they have satisfactory alternative accommodation to go to."

No doubt other local authorities are watching closely to see if Wandsworth will get away with it.

There is no doubt that we have had a large degree of success. Ald. Parker has stated publicly on BBC TV that the Council do not intend to take any children into care. All tenants have been called to see Mr. North, the Welfare Officer, and told that they won't be put onto the streets. And perhaps best of all, we have received a letter from Kenneth Robinson saying that the Council have assured him that they do not intend to put any families onto the streets.

Obviously much ground has been made. The nine-month threat is now a paper tiger and the tenants no longer feel threatened by it. This, of course, is the most important thing of all.

However, this does not mean the campaign is over. Having gained some success we are now pushing for the following three points:

1. A public, official, written assurance to the homeless families that the eviction threat will not be carried out.
2. A reply to the question: "What happens to those families who have been unable to find accommodation in nine months?" We know they will not be evicted but will they go to "problem family units" as is rumoured, with 24-hour supervision?
3. The reletting of empty Council-owned houses in Battersea, which were going to be left vacant for two-three years. Why should not the homeless be housed in them—with or without Council permission?

In furtherance of the first two points a letter was sent to every Councillor asking them to bring up the subject at the Council meeting on November 15. Not one Councillor saw fit to do so, but about 20 homeless people and supporters were in the public gallery, and we did. The Mayor and Alderman Parker went berserk and we were ejected. But we had made our point, and we all enjoyed it immensely.

We thank those who have supported us.

The campaign continues.

—RON BAILEY in *Freedom*

As with housing, so with town planning. The ordinary citizen has hardly any control over the urban environment, and is not expected to want any. It is a matter for the authorities, working in secrecy and presenting the citizens with a *fait accompli*. The problem, and the possibility of action were discussed in ANARCHY 41 by Robert Swann in a remarkable article "Direct Action and the Urban Environment". Here David Gurin examines it, again in an American context.

Planners and protesters

DAVID GURIN

PROFESSIONAL CITY PLANNING IS IN DEMAND AS A REMEDY for American urban problems. Its chief sponsor is the Federal government, which in the past twenty years has made Federal-local grants-in-aid contingent on evidence (at least on paper) of cities' and towns' "comprehensive community planning". City planning has also become an eager recipient of grants from major foundations, a crusading theme for television and the press, and a panacea prescribed by state, county and municipal propaganda.

This extensive official acceptance and mass media support is based on the urban establishment's experience with professional city planners. They have turned out to be scarcely a reformist challenge, much less a revolutionary threat, to local power structures; and their impact has been still slighter on national corporate power, the force ultimately determining the shape of our cities. The planners have rarely been known simply to improve urban aesthetics (street tree planting or billboard removal are "unsophisticated solutions" in their professional jargon), let alone try to remold community values. But the real designers of the city use the fashionable ethos of city planning as window dressing for their own profitable strategies—from major urban renewal and high-way projects to local street widenings. Among the important urban designers are real estate owners, builders and construction contractors, automobile manufacturers and related industries, and the private banks and institutions which dominate "public" authorities by holding their bonds.

Some of these forces once feared any kind of public planning as socialistic, but now they appreciate city planners as compliant municipal

DAVID GURIN's paper was read to the Conference on Radicals in the Professions at Ann Arbor, Michigan, in July last year. He is a New Yorker with a master's degree in City Planning from Harvard.

functionaries. For example, the final outcome of the planners' conception of a slum and what to do about it can yield windfall profits. Rather than dealing with slums in terms of the economic and social conditions that create them, the planners have usually characterized slums as chunks of urban geography marked primarily by the dilapidation of housing. That dilapidation is often caused by bankers who have black-listed the area (generally because Negroes live there and as property-owners or tenants they are considered poor risks), effectively cutting off mortgage money for repairs; the same bankers may then become civic-minded backers of slum clearance, for which city planners have a profitable formula called urban renewal.

When a cleared site is finally rebuilt, high-rent apartment towers may have replaced tenement homes of the poor (Kips Bay in Manhattan and the West End in Boston typify many such wholesale evictions), or shops of small businessmen may have been levelled into parking lots desired by adjacent large enterprises (as in Manchester, N.H., or Syracuse, N.Y., where the land in certain downtown projects was "renewed" entirely into pavement for parking). A frequent variation on that theme is the important hospital or university with expansion plans (Columbia and Chicago Universities and Bellevue Hospital are examples) and with an irredentist passion to absorb the surrounding (usually predominantly Negro or Puerto Rican) city blocks. In each case colorful maps and brochures are produced by the professional planning staff of the municipality, and for what amounts to a land-grab a "scientific" city planning rationale is provided—"the proposal is a challenging concept for revitalizing a seriously deteriorated and blighted section . . . physical amenities, social and economic needs have been taken into account . . . a variety of government aids will be utilized".

The professional planner serves entrepreneurial power not just on a neighborhood scale but in entire metropolitan regions. Land speculators with holdings on the fringes of cities benefited from the Federal Housing Administration's post-war encouragement of suburban building (while F.H.A. policies tightened mortgage money for rebuilding within cities). The automobile industry joined the speculators in encouraging the city planners' chief scheme for travel to and from the new suburban developments—freeway systems. Six-lane highways and cloverleaves were constructed around every city to accommodate the products of an economy dominated by the manufacture and sales of cars and accessories. (One business in six in the U.S. is automotive.) This automobile-serving process might have continued until most of the central areas of old cities were converted to replicas of suburban shopping centers. But the process has been slowed and in some cases stopped because intense (and profitable) downtown activity also has powerful partisans—department stores, office building owners, city governments fearful of losing their property tax base. Under their influence "Save the Central Business District" became a major city planning goal. To achieve it, the planners urged pedestrian malls, commercial and industrial renewal, and improvements in the bus and subway systems which are indispensable to a thriving downtown.

The professional planners seem to suffer no ideological agony in frequent changes in position like their shift from highway to mass transportation advocacy. City planners obey the dictates of power and their rewards are conventions at the best hotels, the finest offices in City Hall and high salaries—often paid to them as "consultants" to avoid civil service jealousies. Washington is liberal with funds through planning assistance programs (and will soon be even more generous if Johnson's \$2.3 billion "Demonstration Cities Program" is enacted). Today's city planners have lots of equipment—but few values.

Their stock-in-trade is abstract planning technique, theoretically applicable in any city (justifying the trek from city to city in search of higher pay and prestige) but of proven usefulness in none. According to a leader in the profession, Prof. Lloyd Rodwin of M.I.T., in a pamphlet, *The Roles of the City Planner in the Community*, "The city planner is the professional advisor and diagnostician on the physical environment of the city—especially on the problems and on the methods of making and of establishing a framework for public and private decisions affecting the physical environment."

Turgid as this may seem, it is a comparatively straightforward statement from a group obsessed with defining itself professionally. But what sort of special education and skills (other than those of lawyers, architects, economists—who Rodwin assures us city planners definitely are *not*) are required for this "professional advisor"? The planning fraternity's criteria, although displayed as profoundly technical, are actually equal to general education and general skills, accompanied by a willingness to accept jargon in place of meaning and to spend tedious days using an adding machine or coloring maps. The graduate curriculum in city planning is a miscellany of economics, sociology, architecture and map-making, in too many instances taught at freshman level. Two years of it plus some familiarity with the latest gadgetery of computerdom may crush any idealistic notions a student has about planning cities, but it will get him a Master of City Planning (M.C.P.) degree. The academic requirements and the output of the graduates of courses in city and regional planning (the full title preferred in graduate schools) suggest that planning is a pseudo-profession, without specialized skills or a unique discipline.

Richard May, Jr., a member of the Board of Governors of the American Institute of Planners (A.I.P.), told a public meeting in January 1966 that "we at the A.I.P. are trying to decide what it is that planners do, and what we do that others don't". (They have been trying since the A.I.P. was founded in 1917.) May was dismayed that "our profession has failed to give to the press and to the public at large the idea that we have a way of analyzing and dealing with the problems of the city". The failure, however, is not in press or public relations, but in the fantasy of a planners' special "way".

A wasteful and misleading fantasy. Planners' reports hide harsh specifics in dulcet generalization. A notable specimen is *New York City's Renewal Strategy/1965*, issued last December. Prepared for the New York City Planning Commission's Renewal Program (a joint

Federal-city undertaking) over four years at a cost of \$3.25 million by private consultants, it tells nothing more than what everybody already knew about the city's slums—"Stair treads grow hollow with the passage of countless feet. . . . Pipes leak and rust through long cycles of use . . . many of our structures deteriorate and frequently threaten human life."

When the report received a bad press, a professional planners' organization sponsored a critical meeting to probe the reasons. Donald Monson, an expert with long experience in Detroit and associated with the New York Planning Commission in the early stages of its Community Renewal Program, ruefully described the multi-million dollar *Strategy* as "a preamble for a plan for a strategy for a non-strategy for New York" and "absolutely of no use to anyone".

Richard Bernstein, Executive Director of the City Planning Commission (at \$22,500 yearly), defended the *Strategy* in a jumble of sociology and political clubhouse chauvinism. He compared the document to the Federal government's Moynihan Report in its concern for the Negro poor. As for those who have fled the city—"New York will be a great city whether the middle-income groups want to remain in the suburbs or return". In reply to Monson's allegation that the report failed to consider the integrity of separate communities within the city (a mandate to the Commission in the City Charter) he invoked "the interest of the city as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts"—a city planner's catechism muttered to scare away local opposition whenever the Cossacks of highway building or urban renewal charge into a neighborhood.

Neighborhoods are apparently of only microscopic concern to professionals intrigued by "interactional consequences of megapolitan regionalism", and for whom problems are always complicated by a "multiplicity of overlaps and interdependencies between sub-systems". In planning reports, to house the poor is "to supply minimum environmental standards for immobile residents". "Process" and "flow" are vogue words and to produce "sophisticated" and "holistic" analyses is the goal of the hip practitioner, who speaks not of city planning but of "urban systems planning". The quality of streets, parks and subways plays second-fiddle to data processing or to the simulation of urban patterns in elaborate models, flow charts, and "games" that would make the Parker Brothers envious.

This kind of bombast is the specialty of the planners' professional quarterly, the *A.I.P. Journal*. Representative is an article by Prof. Melvin Webber (City Planning faculty, University of California, Berkeley), "The Roles of Intelligence Systems in Urban Systems Planning", in the November 1965 issue. Webber predicts "a new injection of scientific morality" into urban affairs when computerized "data banks" or "intelligence centers" are set up. In his wonderful world "academic types find themselves shuttling back and forth, with increasing frequency, between classroom and White House, state house, city hall, and corporation executive suite. Once admitted to these high councils, it is unavoidable that they identify to new sets of peers. . . ." Penetrate Webber's gibberish (e.g. "increased understanding of urban processes

is depreciating product-perception of cityness") and find steadfast acceptance of the myth of easy-going pluralism in existing local government and a roseate view of the future—if only we allow a "saturation of scientific talent into urban affairs".

Another article in the same *A.I.P. Journal* is "Urban Policy in the Rationalized Society" by Donald Michael. He foresees (and seems to favor) government by "top-flight professionals and managers" rather than any increase in participatory democracy as the fruit of automation. Planners seem to approve the old spoils system, so long as professionals are the new victors; they look forward with Michael to "fewer jobs for the untrained and unskilled political appointees as their jobs are eliminated through rationalization and as remaining jobs become increasingly meshed with apolitical special purpose agencies and authorities". But some of the most skilled men in government today are political appointees. And agencies and authorities, as well as city planning boards and commissions, are *never* apolitical; their politics, unfortunately, are hidden by the complications of revenue bond financing and by the decisions of "eminent citizens", rather than open to public debate and legislative action.

Once power is abdicated to these agencies they fight its return to popularly elected officials as fiercely as police departments resist civilian review boards. Mayor Lindsay is discovering this in New York in his efforts to merge Robert Moses' Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority with the New York City Transit Authority into a single Transportation Administration in which the Mayor would be influential. The semi-autonomous New York City Planning Commission, as yet unable to produce the master plan assigned to it in 1938, would also benefit from Mayoral domination. Elected mayors and city councils of any city would not be infallible as city planners of their constituencies, but are preferable to an aristocracy of professionals like the one anticipated in Michael's planned new world where: "the top-level decision-making professional will have to seek intensively for wisdom all his life"; but elsewhere "apathy will be a typical response, and so will large and small protest actions based on and appealing to the emotions". With this kind of Big-Brother-Knows-Best vision (endemic among planners) it is no wonder that in Michael's cool calculus of the acceptable future "Viet-Nam type wars likely will be a continuing drain on resources".

But just as some ordinary citizens have found aspects of foreign policy, although managed by professionals, to be odious, so others have objected to professionally drawn plans and have battled against their imposition by city governments. The objectors have defeated highways planned to bisect the Panhandle of San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park. They have fought to prevent excavations (for underground garages) in old parks with tall trees, losing in Detroit's Grand Circus Park and in the Boston Common, but saving Madison Square Park in New York. In Mount Vernon, N.Y., housewives checked highway expansion plans of the East Hudson Parkway Authority. When a similar free-wheeling agency, the Massachusetts District Commission, proposed to destroy a stand of sycamores while

altering Memorial Drive in Cambridge, residents and undergraduates protested, but the distinguished city planning faculties of Harvard and M.I.T. were silent.

Protestors have stopped urban renewal projects or have forced changes in projects where they conflicted with the needs of residents in several cities. In New York the most constructive plans for the design of apartment houses and parks, and even for the routing of buses, have come from voluntary local groups with pitifully small resources in comparison to those of the Planning Commission and its urban renewal arm, the Housing and Redevelopment Board (with a combined staff of 800). Instead of trying to squash this local talent, cities could encourage it by hiring planners to work in architect-client relationships with communities, the communities retaining private clients' rights.

Prof. Staughton Lynd, Yale historian, civil rights and peace leader, was a student in the Harvard city planning program in the 'fifties; but he dropped out to work at the University Settlement on New York's Lower East Side, where he became one of the inspirers of the Cooper Square urban renewal protest. In Cooper Square (as in the Woodlawn section of Chicago and in other districts within big cities) residents discovered that they could make surveys with more insight into housing conditions, playgrounds and shopping facilities than the professional planners who claimed special expertise in these matters. Block meetings on summer evenings stimulated the drawing up of plans which, unlike the Planning Commission's, would not require the eviction of families unable to pay higher rents after government-assisted rehabilitation. The residents' attempt at the "strenuous citizen participation" which the City officially encourages was caught in a spider-web of self-protective talk spun by the planners—"Cooper Square must follow the formula, the Housing and Redevelopment Board cannot make a plan until the City Planning Commission, as a result of Community Renewal Program studies, recommend designation for urban renewal". The articulate local people responsible for *An Alternate Plan for Cooper Square*, a persuasive document, were contemptuously dismissed by the Planning Commission as the folk of "Kookie Square".

The Planning Commission also favored the Lower Manhattan Expressway, which was opposed by the Local Planning Boards (officially appointed, but with only advisory powers) in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side, the two communities through which the overhead route would have cast a permanent shadow. (Mayors vacillated for twenty years, but Wagner finally approved the route. Now Lindsay has reversed that decision.) Although opposition to the route aroused not only passion in Lower Manhattan but reasoned argument against highway *uber alles* transportation policy, no professional staff member working for the Planning Commission ever resigned or spoke publicly against the Expressway.

That silence and that contempt for Cooper Square's local efforts are rooted in professionalism and in centralized power. Both are the enemy of the city planning radical, the local protester; but both are the friend of the city planning liberal, who finds solutions in more "profes-

sional training" and in the creation of higher levels of authority, like the new Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and the proposed Department of Transportation. These new departments may hand out grants more rationally. A department concerned with *all* modes of transportation, for example, will have to compare \$1.5 million spent for one mile of new highway or a single interchange with the same amount spent for projects with measurably greater public benefit, like track connections and electrical equipment for subways and commuter railways. But only at its political peril would a Transportation Department ignore that famous equation of the interests of General Motors and the nation attributed to Charles Wilson. And the Department of Housing and Urban Development cannot be expected to recommend that urban renewal projects and zoning and subdivision regulations (the core of city planning in most localities) be replaced by communal land ownership. (Although the city most admired by American planners, Stockholm, attributes its success, according to *Scientific American*, "to one all important factor: public ownership of the land".)

The planning radicals, the local opposition groups, also occasionally turn to Federal agencies such as the Urban Renewal Administration or the Bureau of Public Roads, in search of an ally in their fight against a particular municipal project. But this is at best only a delaying tactic, because the Federal agencies are as pressured as the municipalities by, for example, the automotive *realpolitik* that assigns most transportation grants-in-aid to highways rather than rails.

The protest groups are the first to run counter to the growth (for the past fifty years in the U.S.) of city planning as a professional category rather than a social movement. A descendant of turn-of-the-century City Beautiful and Good Government leagues, the city planning idea, although it always has dealt with intensely political variables, never has had any kind of mass political support—until the local protest groups began to organize. Their storefront offices and home-made surveys and plans represent a new consciousness of environment in a wide range of communities—slums, middle class neighborhoods, and suburbs.

People who once were resigned to the deterioration of a neighborhood as an inevitable part of its aging, or who were easily convinced that an improvement for automobile traffic at whatever toll in homes, historic structures or entire districts was "progress", are now less fatalistic about their physical surroundings. Many now have the notion, once prevalent only in the country club suburbs where the City Beautiful movement flourished, that they can have a role in planning and reshaping the city.

These aroused groups and the general urban citizenry deserve skilled help from professionals who, while expert, are still human, and who understand and practise their specialties in terms of overall community aspirations. A traffic engineer, for instance, whose goal is moving not a maximum number of *cars* but a maximum number of *people* by all modes of transportation, and who includes sidewalk aesthetics, pedestrian safety and clean air as variables in his calculations,

can play an effective city planning role. Other kinds of engineers, along with architects, landscape architects and economists under enlightened political leadership, are also essential to planning cities. But the necessity for that hybrid—the professional city planner—is questionable. The professional planners have reduced too much of contemporary city planning to vulgarized cybernetics in the service of what amounts to municipal market research. Ironically, it is not the professional's official plans, but the pockets of opposition to them—as yet mostly isolated but with some signs of coalescing into a movement—that offer our best hope of achieving the city planning ideal of rational community growth in a beautiful environment.

THE BARNSBURY ENVIRONMENT

In the autumn of 1965 the LCC blandly placed a Compulsory Purchase Order on a block of property in Barnsbury—a self-contained area in Islington—with no detailed proposals to back their order. The Barnsbury Association used this as the platform for launching an environmental study which showed how through traffic might be channelled out of what amounts to a neighbourhood area on to peripheral surrounding routes and how the centre and the open space of the area might be given the chance to function properly. Following the public inquiry, Richard Crossman, the then Minister of Housing and Local Government, pushed the GLC, Islington and his department into setting up a study team. He promised the Association that they would be consulted during the course of the study, and in characteristic fashion he demanded that the job should be started immediately by a probe study to be completed within three months. This was to include a general appraisal of the area, an investigation into the possibility of excluding or canalizing through traffic, and a study of the problems of parking, garaging and access to premises.

In August 1966, after strenuous political infighting, an interim report was produced. For the report, information was gathered on accidents, accessibility, servicing conditions, off-street parking, garages and existing traffic management measures. The Association supplied the manpower for the parking survey. Islington Council produced a land-use study, basic data from the census, and information on public transport and historic buildings. The report extended the potential environmental area, it highlighted the need for residential renewal and it raised the whole question of how local people can be involved in environmental planning.

Throughout, however, the Ministry has been over-cautious, Islington over-secretive and the GLC has taken away with one hand what it has given with the other. The report was received critically by the Association, and scotched almost immediately by a crude traffic management scheme put forward by a department of the GLC apparently not party to the discussions. Relations between the Association and the Ministry worsened to the point where the Minister had to receive a deputation on the lack of proper consultation.

Fortunately, with the abandonment of the traffic management scheme and placatory promises by Anthony Greenwood, Crossman's successor, the situation has improved. The final report, much more in line with Buchanan's original concept and with its whole emphasis broadened to include the fundamental problems of life in the area, is due to appear by the end of 1967. If the lessons of Barnsbury are to be learnt, local authorities must find a real means for the residents involved to participate long before concepts can be put into action. Ted Hollamby's pub meetings in redevelopment areas or a "site" office (caravan?) where people can find out exactly what is happening are minimal requirements when the issues are so important.

—ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, November 1967

Anarchism as a social philosophy is concerned with popular initiative rather than on that of the "authorities". Nowhere is it harder to find aspects of social life where ordinary people can break in on and influence the situation than in housing and planning. Yet nowhere is it more urgently necessary. In this issue we set out a detailed proposal for the transfer of council housing to tenants' co-operatives, Pat Goldacre examines the trials of the homeless in Wandsworth and David Gurin discusses the challenge to the "professionals" by the "protesters" in town planning.

Several previous issues have sought to explore the possibilities and limitations of popular intervention in these fields. In ANARCHY 24 on "Housing and Helplessness" we analysed the significance of the post-war squatters' movement—far and away the most significant example of such intervention. In ANARCHY 26 Brian Richardson discussed the implications of the demonstration at Newington Lodge, the County Council Reception Centre in London. In ANARCHY 35 on "House and Home" we looked at the significance of the demonstration over the Cobb eviction in Paddington, and in ANARCHY 37 J. D. Gilbert-Rolfe described similar action in Tunbridge Wells. In ANARCHY 41 Robert Swann discussed Direct Action and the Urban Environment, in ANARCHY 58 Brian Richardson reported on the King Hill Hostel struggle, and on the basis of the experience there set out in ANARCHY 67 a plan for a Co-operative Hostel for the Homeless, while in ANARCHY 77 on "Do-it-Yourself Anarchism" Andy Anderson examined the political meaning of the King Hill campaign.

ANARCHY 84 next month, on "The Lower Depths" looks further at other aspects of poverty. The material which we present in ANARCHY is not intended as bedside reading but as the groundwork for informed and effective action. Use it!