'GIVE THE PEOPLE HOMES!'

Britain's Multi-Storey Housing Drive

Miles Glendinning (Horsey)

Ph D

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 1991

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and is all my own work.
This account explains why, how, and at whose instigation, large numbers of multi-storey blocks (6 or more storeys) were built by municipalities across the whole of Britain within a few years, chiefly in the 1960s.

The thesis begins with an introductory chapter which sets out the author's own values, outlines the method of investigation and presentation of evidence, and briefly surveys other recent accounts of this subject. These have mostly claimed that the decisions by municipal councillors to build high flats were substantially determined by outside influences, such as professional groups or building contractors. It is made clear that this thesis will contest this historical consensus that municipal decision makers were little more than puppets.

The main text pursues this argument in a step-by-step manner through chronological and thematic discussion. Part I describes how high flats, previously a vehicle for avant-garde architectural design, were forcefully grasped in the 1950s by powerful municipal housing interests as a weapon to defend their building and patronage apparatus against a threat posed by a national, professional grouping: town and country planners, set on encouraging mass population 'overspill' from the municipalities. Part I evaluates the power and motivation of the municipal 'housing crusaders' against that of other groupings, such as Central Government or contractors: it is found that these councillors and supporting officers were the only group with both power and motive to force through the sharp policy change to multi-storey building.

Part II tackles, indirectly, the question of how an unorchestrated, cumulative movement, springing not from external pressure and coordination but from the cities themselves, could have spread right across the country and produced such seemingly uniform results. This Part presents an overview of the 'national' multi-storey drive in its fully-developed form, during the 1960s, with two aims: firstly, to show that the pattern of high building across Britain was not uniform, but very diverse, with particular divergences between those three main 'regional' subdivisions, Greater London, the rest of England and Wales, and Scotland. Secondly, that, although not orchestrated, the 'national' multi-storey drive in fact had a very strong underlying structure: a hierarchical relationship, between the powerful large municipalities who made the decisions and set the pace, and everybody else who followed them - including smaller towns, the building industry, and civil servants. Part III rounds off the story with a brief glimpse into the rejection of Modern housing production from the late 1960s onwards.
FRONTISPIECE: Glasgow's Housing Crusader: Councillor David Gibson, Housing Committee Convener 1961-4, seen in 1962.
'GIVE THE PEOPLE HOMES!' Britain's Multi-Storey Housing Drive

TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

VOLUME 1

Abstract

1 Table of Contents for entire thesis

2 Introduction: Aims and Methods

63 Part I: A Municipal Crusade: Modern Flats and the Defence of Housing Production

80 Chapter 1: The Land Trap: High Flats versus Overspill
148 Chapter 2: Central Government, Local Government and Housing Production in the 1950s
185 Chapter 3: Quantity or 'Quality'? : Defeat of the Designers
228 Chapter 4: Financing and Organising the 'Sixties Housing Drive
249 Chapter 5: Package-Dealers and Negotiators: Housing Production and the Building Boom

VOLUME 2

317 Table of Contents for Volume 2

318 Part II: The 'Sixties: National, Regional, Local Patterns

325 Chapter 6: David Gibson: Scotland's Housing Crusader
416 Chapter 7: The Curate's Egg: Provincial Initiatives in England and Wales
480 Chapter 8: Break-up of an Empire: Reorganisation and Revitalisation in London

550 Part III: End of the Drive

554 Chapter 9: The Breakdown of 'Production'
576 Chapter 10: 'New Slums'?

590 Conclusion

605 Abbreviations used in Text and Footnotes
609 Bibliography
623 List of Interviewees
628 Statistical Tables
635 Maps
643 List of Figures (Illustrations, Statistical Tables, Maps)
INTRODUCTION: AIMS AND METHODS

In this introductory section, the underlying principles and methods which have guided this study are set out, and are compared to those of existing literature on this subject. The chapter is divided into four sections:

(1) a brief summary of the subject of this thesis, defining what it is about and, equally importantly, what it is not about;

(2) a survey of other recent accounts of the subject;

(3) a discussion of my own aims relative to this subject, and an exposition of the method adopted, including a description of the general line of argument, the structure of the account, and the method of research and evidence-collecting;

(4) a recapitulation of (2) and (3), in the form of a brief comparison of the possible merits and deficiencies of my approach with those of significant recent accounts.
SUBJECT OF THESIS

The aim of this thesis is to provide a historical explanation for one of the most dramatic episodes in the physical development of this country since the Industrial Revolution: the building of very large numbers of working-class dwellings throughout urban Britain by public housing agencies, within a very short space of time during the late 1950s and 1960s, in an unprecedented form: multi-storey blocks of flats. This movement was extraordinary not only in the speed of its spread and in its novelty, but also in the suddenness and vehemence of its rejection. It thus provides the historian with a defined, even closed subject to an extent rare in postwar history.

But first, a few preliminary points of definition are necessary: for public housing is truly a vast subject. As already stated, this account is concerned chiefly with multi-storey blocks. Multi-storey blocks, or high blocks, have been normally defined (for instance, by Government criteria), as blocks of six or more storeys, with lifts. Other types of related housing lower in height will be included where relevant, but multi-storey blocks are our main concern here. Chronologically and thematically, this thesis also has a particular focus: the decade or so when high blocks were built in very large numbers across the whole of urban Britain. It is concerned exclusively with the processes by which so many of these blocks were built, and asks three fundamental questions. Who was responsible for this prodigious construction drive, across the whole country? Why was it undertaken? And how was it carried through?

This thematic and chronological definition is vital to grasp at the outset, as it sets the direction of the thesis firmly into an area at the junction of political, architectural and social history, focusing particularly on the activities of groups and individuals concerned with housebuilding at a municipal and (to a lesser extent) national level, and on their governing values - above all, 'output' or 'production' of new dwellings. However, although the Introduction to Part I attempts briefly to set the 1960s multi-storey drive in the historical context of
a municipal housing production tradition, as it had developed since 1919, there is no systematic account of the growth of municipal housing as such – of why and how it had come to be so firmly entrenched in Britain after World War I, in contrast to most other Western countries. Nor can this thesis embark on an analysis of other wider issues affecting the context of municipal housebuilding: it does not, for instance, contain any general discussion concerning the processes of municipal decision-making. This account takes it as read that by the 1950s, a high and continuing level of public housing provision was assumed by a variety of powerful and entrenched political and administrative interests. What concerns us here is not the existence, but the direction of this drive in the '50s and '60s.

It should also be emphasised that, as this thesis is concerned solely with the provision of multi-storey flats – with the decisions to build this pattern of housing on a major scale, and the various actions needed to put these decisions into effect – the subsequent story of high blocks' experience and use, by groups such as tenants and housing managers, is excluded. This story is so enormous that it would fill an entirely separate book, whose researching would require intense investigation of interrelated fields such as the history and politics of housing allocation and management, the history of building performance, maintenance and repair, and the history and socio-psychology of habitation (including the discovery of a precise historical formula of expectations among users and managers, and its correlation with the history of changing public fashions and preferences concerning dwellings). It also risks introducing the potentially anachronistic influence of today's professional orthodoxy of 'user participation', which attacks 'top-down' or 'mere' provision and advocates that the 'user' should interact with, influence, or even determine any service, rather than merely passively receive it. Although these ideas only became widespread in the late 1960s, at the end of the period under discussion here, they have (as will be seen shortly) influenced some recent historical accounts of this period. It may, of course, be that even the limitation of our story to the processes of provision will not be enough to keep this account clear of present-day controversies.
Quite possibly, the rhetoric of 'participation' now exerts such a stranglehold over historians that any account of any subject within housing which fails to make the necessary genuflections towards 'enablers' and 'users', may risk being branded inadmissible. In the Conclusion, we will return again to briefly discuss the subject of the experience and evaluation of our blocks since their completion.

One final, vital point of definition is geographical in nature. This account covers public housing only in Britain, where post-1919 working-class housing provision was dominated by strong municipalities, to an extent unparalleled in the 'Western' world. The system of housing production was very different even in other areas in the British Isles and Ireland where high flats were built. In Northern Ireland, the period after 1945 saw a sweeping change from a private enterprise-dominated system to a public housing drive directed by Central Government largely through the operations of a Province-wide agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Trust, and, to a lesser extent, through close Government supervision of relatively weak local authorities. In the Republic of Ireland, subsidies to private builders continued to dominate 'social housing' provision, although some municipal housing was built, including a large multi-storey development at Ballymun, in the north of Dublin. In the Bailiwick of Jersey, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a forceful public housing drive including many multi-storey flats, but centrally directed by the States Government; only one multi-storey block was built by the States of Guernsey, and none by any of the various public housing agencies in the Isle of Man. This account, being confined to British multi-storey housing, is thus dominated by the theme of municipal power in housing production, and contains only one major geographical polarisation: between Scotland, with its particularly entrenched local Labour housing interests and its longstanding tension between Government and Glasgow, and England, with its polycentric pattern of regions and its complex equation of influences in London. Little specific attention is given to Wales in this account, as few high flats were built in the Principality, and its administrative and legal system of housing provision was very similar to that of England, both before and after the formation of the Welsh Office in 1964.
The general scope of this thesis has now been summarised, and, in due course, we will proceed to discuss in greater detail its method of investigation and analysis. However, such a striking and salient historical topic has already attracted a considerable number of researchers, thus establishing a climate of academic opinion from which the present study cannot be divorced. As, in some respects, this thesis attempts to make a clean break from present-day historical thinking concerning high flats, it is clearly necessary first to explain this existing context. What interpretation, then, have recent historians offered for the building of multi-storey blocks?

Traditionally, housing historians have tended to write as apologists for the housing-reformist orthodoxies of the day. During the first three postwar decades, most such accounts would begin with an introductory explanation of the appalling problems bequeathed by the self-indulgent complacency and rapacity of the Victorian laissez-faire system, and by the early-20th-century failure to adopt sufficiently sweeping State-sponsored remedies; the writer would then introduce, and discuss favourably, whichever recent reformist remedy — decentralist planning, Modern housing, or whatever — he or she favoured. Although this rhetorical method of history-writing has on the whole been rejected by 19th-century specialists, it is still predominant among those dealing with the post-World War II period. An unusually late example of history-writing in direct continuity with early postwar reformism is Nicholas Bullock's account (1987) of the genesis of Modern public housing in 1940s Britain. Bullock's sophisticated discussion of the theoretical debates of postwar housing reformers is set in the traditional context of an assertion of the gravity of postwar housing problems, and of the obvious necessity for widespread State intervention and building.

As pointed out above, there was a revolution in historical attitudes towards this subject in the mid 1970s, immediately following the rejection of Modern housing and Modern architecture in general. Since
then, most historians have derived their 'commitment' not from the Moderns but from the Post- or Anti-Moderns, and have followed Nicholas Taylor in shaping their accounts around the assumption of 'The Failure of "Housing"'.

The present generation of historians reads back today's concerns with participation and preservation into the 1950s and 1960s, and claims that Modern housing in general, and high flats in particular, were foisted on unwilling local 'communities' as part of the tabula rasa reconstruction programmes of homogeneous national agencies. This very simple view, which assumes a monolithic uniformity both at the supposedly active national level and the supposedly passive local level, is supported by arguments that high flats offered no obvious benefits to the local authorities that made the formal decisions to build them, and therefore must in some way have been externally imposed.

The discussion of types or patterns of housing provision is a subject which straddles two main areas of history-writing: on the one hand, architectural history, concerned above all with the physical form of dwellings and with architects and other designers as their creators; on the other, the history of the political, social and economic aspects of housing. These two approaches are moulded by slightly different sets of conventions. Architectural history, long content to see itself as the Little Echo of the architecture of the day, has largely set its accounts within the governing framework of architectural debate, dominated by dramatic, highly morally charged swings of evaluation between polarised extremes - from 'Utopia' to 'Dystopia' and back again. The other approach has been dominated by the assumptions of Marxist structuralism, which revived in popularity in the 1970s and '80s: this is generally preoccupied with the task of revealing underlying forces at work, and setting them within a 'scientific' historicist framework. It will be seen below that most individual accounts of the history of multi-storey flats have amalgamated the two approaches to some extent, to produce general denunciations of the exploitation of the working classes by the 'capitalist State', substantiated by particular arguments about the 'failure' of high flats which have been drawn from architectural
rhetoric. However, for convenience of analysis in this Introduction, accounts will be divided into those with a mainly architectural focus, and those of a more general political-social character.
To tackle the accounts of architectural historians first: these must be understood as a straightforward continuation of the debates within the 'national' architectural elite of the period under study. Such debates, in accordance with a 150-year old convention, have been focused on successive ideals or Utopias. Each Utopia comprises a combination of a particular architectural style and various social, moral or rational values; this recipe of comprehensive goodness is almost invariably contrasted with the equally comprehensive evil of the supposedly fragmented and debased preceding style, and is also possibly associated with some idealised style of the far past. Historical evaluation of postwar public housing has naturally fallen into this same polarised pattern.

As mentioned above, architectural history was first significantly drawn into this utopian debate, and channelled into an attack upon Modern housing, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, by a brilliant young critic: Nicholas Taylor, historian and journalist, Victorian Society caseworker and Labour Party activist. In a special November 1967 issue of the Architectural Review, Taylor (clearly influenced by Jane Jacobs's 1961 volume 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities', the first book to contrast, in utopian terms, 'bad' Modern housing with 'good' Victorian housing), unleashed a devastating polemical blast against 'The Failure of "Housing"'.

Taylor employed three arguments in his attack on slum-clearance and Modern 'mass housing'. The first was the general criticism by any new architectural movement of its predecessor as crude and utilitarian, and thus alienating, in character. Here, by contrast with earlier working-class housing types previously regarded as 'slums': Taylor asserted that 'earlier "unplanned" houses now often seem better homes'. Secondly, he directed this accusation of alienation more precisely at high flats, by reformulating the long-established English ruralising cottage Utopia, under which monumental blocks of housing had been attacked for their alleged suppression of 'individuality'. Despite the conflicting findings of contemporary surveys, Taylor started from the assumption that 'mass housing' was unquestionably and intrinsically unpopular with
its working-class occupants, because of both its monumental appearance and its supposed coerciveness ('the "subjective" hatred of the tenants for the rough-shuttered concrete that is thrust upon them') - just as the LCC architects who first introduced high flats in the 1950s had airily claimed that their types would be more popular with tenants than the tenement-style block dwellings they were to replace.

Taylor identified excessive aestheticism on the part of architects as a principal cause of the resulting 'alienation' against Modern housing: in this, he echoed Lethaby's turn-of-century praise of 'styleless' mediaeval architecture in contrast to the 'puffy and bigwiggy' artificiality of the Renaissance. Although more recent, 'low rise high density' patterns were also criticised by Taylor, multi-storey and 'system built' developments were his real quarry: 'the inflexible inhumanity of the scheme's exterior, in which all hint of the single home is suppressed beneath a rigid uniform of 12M-Jespersen window bands...the architects seem to have been more interested in exposing their white aggregate than in expressing the multi-coloured individuality of the tenants'. Instead, Taylor pleaded that housing should be built 'so as actively to encourage the satisfaction and self-expression of those who call it "home"... this is a moral issue, involving basic senses, emotions, aspirations...the issue at stake is architectural freedom'. The pages of examples which followed, beginning with the 'nightmare sublimity' and 'total lack of individuality' of the Red Road development, Glasgow, rammed home Taylor's message: for the utopian critic or historian writing in the Ruskinian tradition about housing in England, Scotland, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, 'dystopia' was now to be identified above all with the Modern multi-storey block.

It was, however, Taylor's subsequent book, 'The Village in the City' (1973), which elaborated this critique into a powerful, historically-supported Utopia, reinforcing the two linked antitheses - monumental or multi-storey housing versus the individual cottage, and architects' aesthetic domination versus the emancipatory self-expression of the Common Man. Taylor attacked 'the secret world of illusion which so many
architects and architectural critics nurture within them, in defiance of the real world of ordinary people. De Cronin Hastings [owner of the 'Architectural Review'] does not, of course, live in a hill city himself, or on a colliery spoilheap; he lives in a nice, comfortable farmhouse in the Sussex stockbroker belt near Petworth. Civilia is not intended for him - it is intended for the rest of us.' He firmly linked this criticism to high flats: 'Similarly - call me philistine if you will - I would not wish to bring up my children in a flat on the 16th floor, even if all fifteen floors beneath me had been individually designed by Sir Basil Spence or Sir Robert Matthew or some genius in the GLC Architect's Department.' The mixed development pattern of housing, advocated by the LCC designers on grounds that it included both cottages as well as high flats, Taylor exposed as a Trojan Horse, by which architects concealed a move to all-multi-storey schemes.

Now, Taylor set out a much more substantial art-historical account of the rise both of his own Utopian ideal - 'the suburban tradition of family houses with gardens, from Henry II to Raymond Unwin' - and (more importantly for our purposes here) its supposed opposite, "solutions" for the "housing problem" which were not related to the instinctive family life of the village cottage at all. I am referring of course to what were then called tenements but are now called apartments or flats... the fundamental fault of tenements or flats is, to repeat, the hypocrisy of double standards that they express: those who design them would never be seen dead in them.' The link between the cottage and Chestertonian Everyman was given a weighty English-nationalist ancestry: it was traced back to 'the basic Saxon dwelling', a cruck-framed structure whose 'multiple "outshots", giving each family the freedom to extend its home in the way it wanted... can still be seen each week in the advertisements for home extensions and garden sheds on the back page of the Radio Times. The ability to alter and adapt one's own home to one's own desires is a fundamental freedom for Englishmen and woe betide the council committee who ignore it'. There was some ambiguity at the recent end of this lineage: the Unwin-Osborn Garden City/Suburb interpretation of the ideal of the 'English House' was, in historical fact, contradictory to Taylor's terrace ideal, which
emphasised density rather than spaciousness, houses in groups rather than on their own, yards rather than big gardens, and old houses rather than new houses.

But the precise definition of Utopia seemed less important than the blasting of Dystopia. Now there seemed no doubt which type of housing represented the most extreme aberration from the stirring yeoman tradition of the 'English House': multi-storey flats, inspired as they were by the alien 'Gaullist rhetoric of Le Corbusier'. And the municipal housing committees responsible for the massed building of high blocks were now branded not just betrayers of the working classes, but also traitors to English culture.

The significance of Taylor's eloquent polemic (and, indirectly, also that of Jacobs) may be gauged by its pervasive influence on all subsequent architectural or planning histories of Modern housing in this country. These do little more than elaborate one or another of Taylor's central themes: his praise of the 'emancipatory' 19th-century English terraced house, or his attacks on monumental flats on socio-psychological and political-economic grounds.

Alison Ravetz's historical analysis of Modern urbanism in Remaking Cities (1980) draws on all these ideas, but sets them in an even more fervently moralistic framework, very explicitly bound into today's Utopia of Participation: indeed, she declares it a specific intention to reveal 'the various mechanisms of this betrayal of the people'. Correspondingly, a highly homogeneous historical picture of her Dystopia, Modern housing, is painted: she describes 'all aspirations and planning instruments of the period as a "style" which now needs to be... replaced by a different "style"... all must change together'. The tone of this book is a little surprising, coming from an author whose previous work was the outstanding Model Estate (1974), an account of the building and habitation of Leeds's Quarry Hill redevelopment - one of the few books to have brought a meticulously historical perspective to bear on the subject of Modern housing. In Remaking Cities, by contrast, Ravetz's account takes the form of
abstract assertions within loosely thematic chapters, progressing from an analysis of planning theory and practice in terms of class and professional power, to a reformulation of the ruralising Ruskinian Utopia in present-day 'green' terms. Although the book is not specifically concerned with housing in isolation, the 'housing question' is nonetheless omnipresent.

Her analysis of Modern planning and its significance echoes Foucault's theories concerning the key role of the professions in maintaining existing class relations through their exercise of 'power knowledge'. It is based on the following very broad assumptions concerning the balance of power between central and local interests: firstly, the supremacy and homogeneity of the central State as a single bloc intent on domination of local 'communities'; secondly, the power of the national planning and architectural professions within the development process; and, thirdly, the central role in urban development of a 'clean sweep style of planning' imposed through this supposedly dominant professional power. Thus, we hear that (after World War II) 'planning was henceforth to be consciously designed and controlled...the option of State control and centralisation had been chosen'..."the ideal, planned environment was used deterministically to bring about certain social ends'. In Ravetz's view, the 'boundless professional self-confidence among architects and others involved in town planning' caused local-authority officers habitually to 'handicap elected councillors by depriving them of information or else overloading them with it' - although she also admits the power of 'a forceful [housing] chairman with a powerful chief officer behind him'. In her account, there is no mention whatever of the contractual influences given prominence by political historians such as Dunleavy.

Ravetz characterises the pattern of this supposedly planner-directed development, especially high flats, as rigid and totalitarian, in contrast to the piecemeal Picturesque of the 19th century town: 'The postwar development deliberately ignored and slighted the old pattern of urban development, with its small plots and intricate web of buildings... segregation, the imposition of a new geometry, and
escalation of scale were a matter of pride'. This account, by
contrast, will argue by implication that (at least in the housing field)
Ravetz is setting up a 'straw man'. It will be argued that the 1960s
housing drive in general, and high flats in particular, represented a
defeat for central or 'comprehensive' planning and a victory for
piecemeal development, and concerted local interests.

Ravetz's strongest criticisms of Modern developments' supposed hostility
to existing towns, however, emerge in the ensuing exposition of her own,
explicitly anti-urban Utopia. At first she appears to follow the
structuralist pattern of economic and class-based analysis, in her
discussion of the lamentable inequalities created after the war by the
failure to impose State-ordained decentralism on British cities: 'Any
kind of market creates a sort of relative poverty... when space becomes
the commodity, however, the market's invasion of lives and choices
becomes enormously more powerful'. From there, however, we diverge into
the argument that urban life itself is inherently evil, both in terms of
class ('cities as mechanisms for the control of some people by other
groups') and ecology ('the ultimate contradiction was that... the city
was expensive in resources, and depended on and encouraged high levels
of consumption and waste'). In contrast to the fraudulent freedoms of
'cosmopolitan' life and domestic consumerism, with its morally
debilitating 'bias... towards gadgetry rather than space, to comfort and
ostentation rather than room for creative pursuits', Ravetz expounds an
emancipatory and participatory Utopia, derived chiefly from that
'idealised image of the pre-Industrial Revolution English village that
is deeply bedded in the national consciousness', but also inspired by
hippy communes, 'ujumaa' villages and the 'extremes of mass consensus as
were reputedly found in Chairman Mao's China'.

The architectural implications of this ruralising ideal are defined
repeatedly by contrast with the Dystopia of multi-storey flats. Thus
Ravetz asserts (with some disregard for the Scottish/European
continuum of tenement-housing) that 'flats were the critical issue. In
Britain - and more especially in England - there was a deep-seated
antipathy to flats... yet in defiance of this... many "progressive"
architects were fully committed to designing them for council tenants'.
But, while lack of 'choice' over flats was to be deplored, her own
Utopia itself seemed remarkably inflexible: 'Perhaps the greatest
deception of modern architecture and design, however, related to high
buildings... to underestimate the physical, social and psychological
ties of human beings to the surface of the earth... to flout a
fundamental architectural principle: that the vernacular and monumental
should not be confused. The appropriate architecture for domestic life
is the vernacular, and not the monumental'.

This pattern of analysis, with its explanation of urban development in
terms of the role of architects and planners, was perpetuated in several
subsequent histories. The account of Scoffham (1984) is only of partial
relevance to the subject of this thesis (housing production), as it is
almost exclusively concerned with successive 'high' architectural styles
of housing, from the Garden City through the International Modern, the
mixed development, and New Brutalism to 'low rise high density' and
beyond. He condemns both the initial design and the subsequent large-
scale reproduction of each style, and blames architects for both: 'The
building of images, whether those of Le Corbusier or Ebenezer Howard,
did not create satisfactory housing. In this respect Roehampton was
academic architecture - intellectually rational; but as housing it was
misplaced. Yet it came to be repeated, and debased, just as Howard's
Utopia had been debased by many after Unwin, until the next generation
of architects tried out another version of Utopia'. Scoffham's own
personal Utopia, however, is easily predicted: that transcending,
timeless English-nationalist ideal, the 'democratic' country cottage.
'The message for housing in Britain today,' he concludes, 'would appear
to be concealed at the point where the Modern Movement took leave of its
roots in the Arts and Crafts movement, at the point where the
nationalistic traditions of its origins were abandoned in favour of
things foreign... the democratic visions of semi-autonomous villages,
Arts and Crafts skills, and home-based electronic communications may be
nearer to our national identity'.
The two most significant recent contributions in the architectural-history field, those of Finnimore and Owens, are closely related to one another in approach. Both set out to investigate the social and class implications of the postwar housing drive in England and Wales by analysing the wider impact of a utopian idea within architectural theory – in Finnimore's case, 'system building', in Owens's, 'mixed development'. However, the effectiveness of both accounts is diminished by their own failure to break free of utopianism.

Later chapters of this thesis will discuss whether the idea of 'system building' (or 'industrialised building') was of practical or merely rhetorical significance within the postwar public housing drive. Finnimore's account, based throughout on a 'face-value' interpretation of the utopian pronouncements of architects and others, takes 'system building' for granted as a central influence on housing policy and practice. His thesis, and subsequent book (Houses from the Factory, 1989), both begin by discussing a range of published or publicly-stated definitions of the term, and by outlining the political-economic aspects of Welfare-State building construction and the supposed implications of 'system building' for various social and political interests. The Government, seen as a monolithic bloc, is portrayed as the chief instigator, working on behalf of capital to modernise the building industry, by means of centrally-coordinated organisations such as the National Building Agency. State policies on building are seen as highly unified and inspired by the pressure of powerful Government architects.

In subsequent chapters, the groups actually responsible for public housebuilding – local authorities and their contractors – are discussed. Here we learn that, although 'system building', unleashed by architects, made some headway in two case-study authorities (the LCC/GLC and Coventry CBC), nevertheless municipalities' and contractors' adoption of 'system building', in general, fell far short of Government expectations: in the former case, owing to a reluctance to accept 'standardisation', and in the latter case because of lack of local-authority interest. Although one could take issue with Finnimore's
case-studies (on grounds that these two authorities were dominated by architects to a very unusual degree, and that the case-studies thus feed circular argumentation), a more significant point is that no close connection, let alone cause-effect relation, is traced between the idea of 'systems' and the actual production processes of the 1960s housing drive.

From this point on, Finnimore's account becomes increasingly preoccupied with professional and critical debates, such as the proselytising of architects and politicians, the class relationship between labour and the professions, the technical theorisings of consultative organisations such as the NBA, the variety of innovations in 'building technology', and the attitudes of architects to technology. On this basis, Finnimore asserts that 'the disastrous proliferation of systems' fulfilled two roles: firstly, that of facilitating the self-aggrandisement of architects (since 'system building gave rise to a generation of architects venerated by both their profession and the departments of State which they served'); and, secondly, that of providing a 'panacea' by which the 'capitalist State' hoped to avert a 'revolution', in those turbulent years of popular insurgency, the early 1960s. It is not made clear, even in the conclusion to Finnimore's thesis, by which mechanisms this grand conspiracy between the professions and the State could have been linked to, or realised through, the prosaic world of public housebuilding:

'The relationship that system building forced upon the client and producer avoided many of the more obvious inefficiencies of traditional building. These were, primarily, competitive tenders, design in isolation from production, and the fragmentation of large programmes into discreet [sic]... packages carried out by separate contractors. While it is true that each of these inefficiencies could be rectified in traditional building technology, their elimination was firmly associated with system building by the majority of those involved in postwar housing policy. However, the traditional relationship between architect and client was retained - their separateness. The relationship between the client and builder, within the capitalist economy, remained fundamentally unaffected.'

Finnimore concludes, with perhaps unconscious irony, that 'system building, as it developed in Britain, was a panacea indeed: it promised
the benefits of a revolution without a revolution actually taking place'.

If the utopian framework of Finnimore's analysis derives from rationalist tendencies within architectural theory, that of Owens's account is bound up with social and moral utopianism. Owens sets out to show that the architectural theory of mixed development - a pattern combining high and low flats with cottages, and justified in the visual and social terms of 'variety' and 'community', was in fact a vehicle for the rise of the local-authority architect, and a means by which the latter, on behalf of the 'capitalist State', could make more palatable the introduction of high flats and reconstruction sought by the ruling classes, 'so as to obtain the densities required by the capitalist city without reproducing the undesirable features of urban housing identified by 1939. Whether they would be good places to live in was a secondary consideration'.

The plan of Owens's thesis comprises a roughly chronological social-visual discussion of housing policies and patterns sandwiching three local case studies (the LCC/GLC, Liverpool and Leicester). The first two chapters are concerned with the period preceding the subject of this thesis (that is, the advocacy and early building of mixed development in the 1940s and earliest '50s), while two later chapters deal with the period following our subject (the avant-garde architectural rejection of high flats and mixed development at the end of the 1960s). In between, however, there is discussion of several issues of greater relevance to this thesis. The extent of the influence of the Ministry of Housing is evaluated; here, in keeping with her general preoccupation with the importance of the 'design professions', most discussion of MHLG policy is devoted to analysis of the design guides produced by architectural and planning officers. She also investigates the nebulous idea of 'density', used by planners in the 1950s and '60s as a way of exerting power over housing policy and opposing 'site cramming' by the advocates of unrestrained production. Unfortunately, her analysis straightforwardly reproduces the planners' highly partisan point of view in this argument - that density restrictions constituted a fixed
constraint which made it 'irrational' to build higher and higher blocks on any given site. 26

This interpretation then naturally leads to the assertion that the architectural idea of mixed development, rather than the 'numbers-game' ideal of site-cramming, must have been the cause of multi-storey building across the country: 'High rise only became necessary to achieve high density once the decision to build mixed development, that is to include some terrace houses and low flats, had been taken, and even then... it was not the only way to achieve it'. The self-confirming consequences of this somewhat credulous argument are seen in the case-studies, where (sometimes on the basis of relatively little evidence) introduction of mixed developments and multi-storey blocks is interpreted as the result of architectural pressure on councillors against their better judgement, with mixed development invariably 'masking the presence of high flats or minimising their impact'. It will be argued below that the true balance of power and argument over high flats in key provincial centres was exactly the reverse of this; but Owens, taking as her starting-point the entirely untypical case of the LCC/GLC, where the officers (architects, planners and housing managers) maintained close control over housing policy, then extends the same picture to major County Boroughs such as Birmingham and Liverpool. In the latter case, we are told that 'the main battle over use of high flats won, Bradbury [the City Architect] had no compunctions about abandoning mixed development altogether in favour of high flatted developments'. 27

In her conclusion, Owens very explicitly states that it was architects who controlled the course of the entire multi-storey episode, from avant-garde beginnings to 'debased' end: 'An imaginative avant garde uses a social idea... to produce an innovative three-dimensional design. But by the time the great mass of ordinary architects are imitating it... the connection with the social idea is all but lost'. On the previous page, however, Owens lets slip a disguised hint that the power of architects might not have been unchallenged during the 1960s housing boom: 'When system built high flats were being used, the architect
benefitted from mixed development by retaining a controlling interest in the development of the whole site... whereas with flatted developments the contractor's architects might take over the whole job. 39

A similar general line of argument, alleging that architects and planners, and Modern architectural policies such as high flats and mixed development, were essentially a cloak for the maintenance of Establishment interests, is found in two further PhD theses. Marmot's account (1984) argues that powerful municipal architects foisted high flats and other Modern patterns on local authorities: councillors and other groups such as contractors are seen as subsidiary in importance. The scope of her analysis is constrained by the fact that it largely comprises two case-studies from London: the London Boroughs of Hackney (seen as a 'production-line' authority dominated by relations between the Borough Architect and 'package-deal' firms) and Lambeth (seen as dominated by the powerful Borough Architect, E. Hollamby), along with their Metropolitan Borough predecessors. 40 Day's thesis (1988) - an avowedly structuralist art-historical account of the architectural direction of the LCC's housing programme from 1939-56 - is superficially different from the three just discussed, in that it portrays the role of Modern architects within public housing policy not as fully autonomous, but as greatly influenced by underlying forces. However, the purpose of the architects' work, according to Day, was little different from that identified by Owens and the others: to provide 'aesthetic re-workings' of fundamentally unchanged economic, political and class relations. In Day's view, the LCC architects' endeavours were of particular importance in helping to disguise the Labour Party's lamentable failure, when in government, to implement a really 'radical socialist housing policy.' 41
Having outlined those accounts of a mainly architectural-historical character, we must now consider those which adopt a broader political-sociological approach to the subject. This group may be divided into short articles concentrating on high flats, and books more general in scope, but touching on high flats briefly or indirectly - the single exception being Dunleavy's major volume, which will be discussed at the end of this section. Only Dunleavy attempts a serious and systematic analysis of primary source material (although, as we will find, even his use of such evidence leaves a certain amount to be desired); other authors - ironically, in view of their generally 'anti-Establishment' aspirations - rely chiefly on official reports and statistics. It will be seen that most of these accounts are agreed that the multi-storey building form was initially introduced and established in Britain by the architects of 'avant-garde' authorities. Disagreements are centred around the causes of high flats' subsequent large-scale construction - the subject which is also the focus of this thesis.

The first, and still, in many ways, most satisfactory historical evaluation of this episode was Cooney's short article (1974). He attempts to identify one principal cause for each of a number of phases in the history of multi-storey construction in England and Wales: 'The basic problem is not simply to identify probable causes. It is to establish their sequence, comparative importance and interaction'. Following this approach, he first describes the establishment of the point block in UK public housing around 1950 by the newly reconstituted LCC Architect's Department and a few other authorities. The 'demonstration effect' of Roehampton and other pioneering LCC developments, along with certain contemporary Continental exemplars (Swedish and Danish point-blocks, and Corbusier's Unité d' Habitation at Marseille), is seen as primarily visual in character. Moving on to subsequent developments concerning 'the high flat at the level of policy and building' - in other words, to its spread throughout England and Wales - Cooney evaluates the respective roles of the MHLG and local authorities. He sees the Ministry as having exerted an indirect influence during the mid- and late-1950s, through land-use constraints on major cities. These included, notably, the strengthening of Green
Belt provisions, the redirection of planned overspill from further New Towns into less effective 'town development' by the 1952 Act, and the discouragement of virgin-site general-needs building in favour of slum-clearance and redevelopment. By contrast, the active decision to embark on large-scale multi-storey building, within this restrictive framework, is attributed to the determination of many, though not all, of the largest provincial authorities (Salford and Liverpool, for example, but not Manchester) to resist these central-Government planning restrictions. The motive ascribed to the cities was a desire to retain population, rateable value and municipal independence - an interpretation which will be taken up and developed in this account.

The relatively slight account of McCutcheon (1971/5) discusses the central role of 'national' architects in the initial establishment of high flats (emphasising the impact of the prestige of the LCC Architect's Department in reinforcing the authority of the many new local-authority architects' departments founded in its image), and the possible influence and motives of Central Government, and building capital, in promoting the spread of multi-storey building. Arguing on the basis of somewhat sketchy evidence, he speculates that the Government expected cost savings, and believed that tenants would like high flats; regarding the building industry, he states that the greater concentration and capital-intensiveness of the multi-storey building site 'favoured large firms as opposed to smaller ones', but that 'package deals' were especially welcome to small local authorities.

Merrett's volume (1979) provides a broad, but highly partial, overview of postwar public housing policy in England and Wales, in the course of which the emergence of high flats is covered only briefly. His account is the furthest removed from 'committed' architectural utopianism, for instance in its reluctance to acknowledge the sea-change in architectural thinking during the 1960s away from large-scale clearance and housebuilding, and towards conservation. In Merrett's opinion, the sudden official swing in 1968 from redevelopment to rehabilitation, heralded by 'that most notorious of White Papers, "Old Houses into New Homes"', was a self-evidently reprehensible, reactionary deviation from
the principles of command housing provision. Defiantly, he reassures us that 'it is not the argument of this chapter that a huge slum-clearance programme was never necessary. It was.' Merrett's viewpoint is in many ways merely a structuralist reworking of the 'numbers game' of 1960s housing politics. When it is applied to the 1950s housing-policy context of high flats' emergence, the latter are made to appear the culmination of an unbroken succession of 'cuts' - at first sight, perhaps, a somewhat bizarre interpretation of one of the most expensive forms of working-class housing ever devised! The sequence of argument is as follows. Firstly, the Conservative Government's enormous expansion of public housebuilding in 1953 was in fact a 'cut', as the numerical increase was 'engineered by a brutal reduction in standards'. This class-determined 'reduction' was applied at first chiefly to house sizes, but was then extended to land supply: the public-housing programme was redirected from overspill and virgin sites to inner areas and slum clearance (by planning restrictions and the progressive elimination of general-needs subsidies) in order to free the suburbs for the private builder. Local authorities' housing-type choices were 'restructured' in parallel with their land supply - with the lamentable results that we all now know: 'The containment of urban Britain had the effect of reproducing in a new built form, most strikingly in high rise development, the "maggot numbers" of 19th century accumulation and concentration'. This policy is interpreted as a conspiracy between landed, building and finance capital, with the central Government as an obedient agent. Little regard is therefore paid to the perceptions of local authorities (other than the LCC) in this area: local objections to overspill are only hinted at in a reference to an impersonal 'fear of actually gutting the great cities, some kind of planning hara-kiri'. Merrett's evidence is mostly drawn from published sources (such as Ministers' pronouncements or MHLG manuals) or statistical deductions.33.

It is not unsurprising that Merrett's account of the emergence of high flats, although avowedly based on that of Cooney, in fact departs from the latter in one significant respect: it omits any emphasis on the role of the largest municipalities. Merrett stresses the initial importance of architects, and of the LCC: 'The original conception was that of the
architects... the increase in the executive power of architects within
the housing field of the local state led to the concretion of these
visions, originally in the world-famous Roehampton estate of the LCC'.
But the initiative, from the early 1950s, is then seen as passing
directly to the building industry: 'As the number of high flats in
approved tenders grew in the early 1950s, building capital quite
naturally turned its attention to this section of demand... the
persuasion and pressure of construction companies on government policy
at the local and national level is the hidden thread in the skein of
British housing history'. It is taken for granted, as part of this
argument, that multi-storey flats were more profitable for, or seen as
more profitable by, the largest, 'national' contractors: 'This form of
work is not suited to the managerial, technical and financial
capabilities of small and medium firms and therefore the new form itself
constituted a profound advantage for the big capital sector of the
industry. The increasing importance of negotiated and package-deal
contracts... was also an advantage for the very large firms as it raised
their degree of monopoly'. Merrett summarises his very simple two-stage
analysis: 'we can say that the state's switch to a high-density
redevelopment strategy took the shape of high flats because of the
formal hegemony in local authorities of architects who were zealots of
the Modern Movement, and that simultaneously this sea change in the form
of public sector housing was underpinned by the material interests of
big capital in raising its degree of monopoly in the competition for
contracts'.

A more recent variant of Merrett's 'committed' historicist
interpretation is the volume edited by Lowe and Hughes (1991). This,
compiled by 12 authors, including many housing-policy academics but
(curiously, for a work of historical scope) no historians, presents an
overview of the 'progress' of British council housing, from its origins
in the 'failure' of the Victorian private sector to its 'ghettoisation'
at the hands of Thatcherism. The authors see council housing as a
praiseworthy and historically inevitable movement, which was needlessly
stigmatised by certain 'wrong turnings' - above all, output-dominated
prefabricated mass building and that 'disaster', multi-storey housing.
In their view, the revered tradition of Wheatley and Bevan was betrayed by the unabashed output drive of the 'sixties: its ideals must be resurrected, but through a new kind of small-scale, 'sensitive' housing. It will be argued in this thesis, by contrast, that a careful historical analysis will show high production and high flats to have been not an aberration, but a culmination of the story of municipal housing provision in Britain.

Unlike Lowe and Hughes's sweeping panorama, Chris Bacon's account (1985) concentrates on the history of a single major provincial public housing scheme, the Park Hill development, Sheffield, arguing that its fate has been continuously governed by wider social and political-economic forces. Here, its construction, its initial acclaim, and its more recent condemnation as a 'failure', are all ingeniously worked into a familiar Marxist framework. He argues that these were successive stages in the determination of working-class housing conditions in Sheffield by capitalist or class interests. Although Park Hill was in fact the prototype of 'deck-access' housing, the first significant departure from the multi-storey mainstream, Bacon's story in fact parallels other accounts of multi-storey housing as a whole. In the later parts of his book, he describes successive fluctuating phases in the evaluation of Park Hill after its completion (through the 'myths' of 'success' and then 'failure' propagated by architectural critics and others), and portrays each of these phases as a different variety of exploitation. Bacon here turns to advantage his detachment from utopianism, which enables him to highlight the continuity between the early anti-Modern polemic of the 1960s and today's committed Utopian historical accounts of the Modern period. But it is Bacon's first chapter, in which he discusses the 'political and economic determinants' of Park Hill's construction, which is of most direct relevance to the subject of this thesis. The origins of Park Hill are seen as lying in 'a state directed attempt to increase profits' during the 1950s, by means of a range of indirect and direct stimuli. In the indirect category, land policy is seen as encouraging the saving of rural land, and the purchase of expensive urban land - at the instigation of the landed aristocracy, and, indirectly, finance interests - while the requirements of the
latter were also of course satisfied by Treasury-directed restrictions on public housebuilding, such as the reduction of general-needs subsidies and the curtailment of Public Works Loan Board lending facilities. In the direct category, the alleged encouragement of the high-cost multi-storey building form through special subsidies is pointed to as a result of pressure from large contractors and financiers, both hungry for profits. 

Bacon's interpretation is opposed to Cooney's picture of high flats as an expression of municipal resistance to national planning policies, and it goes beyond that of Merrett in its portrayal of the local authority's decision to build particular housing types as conditioned down to the smallest detail by external forces. His account of the general financial and land constraints placed on local-authority housebuilding by Central Government during the 1950s (the winding down of suburban building and the redirection of effort into inner-area slum-clearance) echoes that of Merrett; but Bacon also extends the same analysis to decisions taken by individual authorities. For instance, he claims that the development of the expensive city-centre Park Hill site was prompted by pressure from the local landowner, the 16th Duke of Norfolk, in his 'national' capacity as former junior Agriculture Minister and President of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England; that the Housing Development Committee's decision to build the redevelopment housing for this site in the form of expensive multi-storey flats was prompted by pressure from financial and contractual interests; and, even, that the Committee's and the City Architect's selection of an 'avant-garde' design by two young architects formed an integral part of a nationally-coordinated campaign by large industrial firms to reconstruct major cities. However, Bacon does not support his sweeping account of Sheffield as the helpless tool of external forces by any direct factual evidence concerning the actual processes of policy-making within Sheffield public housing at the time. Certainly, Harold Lambert, Sheffield's Housing Development Committee Chairman between 1958 and 1974, was unable (during a recent interview in connection with this research) to recognise any immediate correspondence between Bacon's account and the debates and issues of the period.
The most important recent account of the multi-storey public housing drive is Dunleavy's *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain* (1981). Not only is this the only 'heavyweight' academic book entirely devoted to this subject; but, also, it is a work which has been accorded very wide respect by other noted historians of housing. For instance Alison Ravetz, at the 'Rehumanising Housing' conference organised at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in February 1987, asserted that Dunleavy's book was 'a model of what a history of housing should be like, in its synthesis of "pure" and "applied" research, and in the utterly scholarly and meticulous way that detailed evidence is built up as a basis for its very strong conclusions'. Few would quarrel with Ravetz's definition of good history-writing: what is at issue is whether it is applicable to Dunleavy's book.

Dunleavy's account discusses the building of multi-storey flats in Britain (although effectively ignoring Scotland) as a case study of Welfare-State building programmes, and their underlying constraints. It poses the question: 'What, if anything, determines who gets what, when and how?' His central argument is a variation on the theme already set out by Merrett - that high flats were a prime example of the way in which Welfare-State provision acted as a cloak for the exploitation of the working classes. In Dunleavy's opinion, the main culprits were big building contractors, whose pressure on local and central government constituted 'the basic dynamic' of the multi-storey boom. His starting point is the assumption, derived from the stock architectural polemic of the last 20 years, that Modern 'mass housing' was inherently inferior to the traditional English cottages of slum-clearance areas, and, equally, to the new cottages of interwar estates. Taking for granted the superiority of the cottage, Dunleavy asserts that multi-storey flats offered 'unacceptable improvements' in housing amenity, because 'individuals' control of their environment is much less in flats and particularly in high flats'.

Having established that multi-storey flats were, in general, a bad thing, Dunleavy embarks on his main analysis, which is concerned with both the introduction and the nationwide spread of the type. This is
divided into two parts. In the first four chapters of the book, he
explores a variety of aspects of 'national' policy-making and debate
concerning high flats. The first was the power, and supposed
interrelation, of various Central Government, professional and
industrial interests, with the effect of encouraging high-flat building.
The second was the changes in Government subsidies relating to high
flats, and their presumed effect in encouraging their construction.
Thirdly, he identifies a 'rationality deficit' in multi-storey building,
claiming that high blocks offered no advantages to local authorities or
the national interest as a whole (in the fields of architectural theory,
land-use planning, development economics, and sociology), and by
asserting that their building was bound up, statistically, with
industrial concentration. Fourthly and finally, he summarises what he
sees as the central political and organisational processes actually
responsible for high-flat building. Here he restates and elaborates
Merrett's chronological framework: 'The architectural profession was
initially important... the planning system accumulated inputs... until
the late 1950s when it exerted a strong influence on the change in
Ministry policy towards high flats; thereafter both the planning system
and local government organisation caused a cumulation of problems which
increased the Ministry pressure for high rise. Similarly the
construction industry and the national local government system
accumulated feedback favourable to further high rise building from
existing outputs'. This first part of the book is largely constructed
around evidence such as published sources and statistical analyses —
although there are some quotations from interviews with unidentified key
figures of the time, such as senior civil servants.  

In the second portion of his book, Dunleavy proceeds to evaluate this
initial conclusion with reference to certain political and sociological
theories, and then tests it against certain local case studies, which
contribute to include both the Ronan Point disaster (discussion of whose
repercussions absorbs one quarter of the chapter about Newham, West and
East Ham) and the Maudsley bribery scandal (similarly prominent in the
Birmingham chapter). His final conclusion is that 'local-authority
decision-making on the high rise issue was more determined than
determinant, and that explanations in terms of structural pressures and influences substantially account for the development of local policies'.

Having outlined the overall framework of Dunleavy's argument, it is now necessary to focus more closely on his account of the subject of this thesis: the spread of high flats across Britain (following their initial establishment by LCC and other architects). This he divides into two stages: a period, from the early 1950s to the early 1960s, when large multi-storey programmes were commenced by major authorities, and the decade from roughly 1962, when extensive high-flat building spread across the country (a division which roughly corresponds to that between Parts I and II of this account).

Dunleavy sets his discussion of the first period in the context of the land and organisational constraints of public housing during the '50s. Here, he introduces two promising tools for the ranking of local authorities. The first is the notion of regional hierarchies, in which 'higher level housing authorities' (such as, of course, the LCC, but also major provincial centres such as Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham) 'clearly set patterns which were followed by lower level authorities'. The second is what he calls the 'national local government system': here he begins to suggest that 'higher level' authorities could exert a nationwide influence through inter-authority contacts and joint organisations. However, Dunleavy does not develop this hierarchical framework any further, and indeed immediately sets about belittling it, by emphasising that all local authorities, of whatever size, were subject to much more significant external pressures.

His discussion of the first of these pressures, the land constraints on public housing in the 1950s (in which the Government encouraged municipalities to redirect their efforts to slum-clearance), in effect reproduces the decentralist, anti-urban utopianism of the Garden City and regional planning movement: 'Policies such as the equalisation of housing standards... across metropolitan areas were explicitly debarred... the defence of high-density inner-city redevelopment as a
planning goal rested upon two pillars, the notion of the nuclear city as a pyramid of market values, and the structure of existing social locations. Only superficially, Dunleavy asserts, could high flats offer a way out of this impasse: 'a direct attack could be mounted on inner-city housing standards without altering the planning system, the local government structure, or the existing balance of social pressures... authorities could tackle their own problems in situ, without loss of population via overspill, without boundary or building land extensions, without cooperation across local authority boundaries'. Yet, inevitably, their use for even this highly suspect purpose was in the end frustrated by 'faulty planning technology': this conclusion Dunleavy supports by repeating the 'diminishing returns' arguments of the planners of the day, that higher densities or higher blocks were unproductive in terms of dwelling gain. However, there is no discussion as to whether there was any conflict between local and central government over land policy questions (such as whether or not to overspill population), and thus the question of whether 'site cramming' with high flats might not have been consciously pursued by local authorities as an 'anti-planning' or 'anti-central' policy does not even arise within Dunleavy's analysis. 

So why should local authorities all over Britain have chosen to embark on this policy, which (within the framework of constraints Dunleavy has allowed us to consider) seems to have been so 'irrational' and against their own interests? Clearly they must have been deceived or forced to do so. Accordingly, an ascending range of external influences is postulated. At the most immediate level, Dunleavy implies that members were often misled by officers, against their better judgement, into embarking on multi-storey programmes: architects such as T.E. North of West Ham CBC are chiefly blamed here, for their 'fatalistic' reproduction of LCC patterns, as are borough engineers; but town planners also face the charge of 'remoulding of huge urban areas in an image conjured up by the local authority in isolation'. Dunleavy also argues, by statistical inference, that the MHLG exerted considerable influence on the scale of high-flat building, through the additional subsidies which it provided. However, he also points to weaknesses and
divisions in the Ministry's own policies, by highlighting the tolerance or favour shown towards high blocks by MHLG Housing Administrators, against the reservations of the Ministry's Planners and Housing Architects - a point which will be endorsed in this account. These professional pressures are, however, acknowledged to have been uncoordinated: 'Nothing remotely resembling a conscious elite conspiracy on high rise can be discerned'.

A further, overarching influence is therefore required, and this is provided by the large national building contractors, which are portrayed as having exerted pervasive pressure in favour of multi-storey flats (as early as the mid-1950s) on the Ministry and design professions, on advisory committees such as the CHAC, and on the 'national local government system'. At individual local-authority level, Dunleavy relates three case studies (Birmingham, Bristol and West/East Ham/Newham), which, he asserts, provide proof of significant contractual pressure. However, the primary evidence cited in these major examples, all county or London boroughs of the first or second rank, hardly supports Dunleavy's claims. In fact, this evidence is largely confined to some negotiated contracts of 1953 in Birmingham, which are presented, without further substantiation, as proof of 'pressure'; in Bristol and West Ham, the evidence is even more unpromising, as high flats were during this decade persistently associated not with negotiated contracts but with varieties of competitive tendering.

The second phase of Dunleavy's analysis of high flats' spread covers their large-scale, routine construction up and down the country in the decade from around 1962. This he attributes almost entirely to contractual influence, through the vehicle of 'industrialised building' and 'system building'. We will see in a later chapter of this thesis that the notoriously vague concept of system building was, on the whole, associated with prefabricated construction, an area which (in view of the requirement for initial investment in factories, and so forth) was naturally dominated by large or fairly large contractors. Dunleavy's consideration of this topic begins with the highly contentious assumption that 'system building' was no mere architects' and
contractors' slogan, but the main engine of the multi-storey drive (a claim, as we saw, pursued by Finnimore): from here, a very useful self-reinforcing argument opens up, which enables him plausibly to link high flats and industrial concentration. He asserts that the main phase of high flats' spread began when, in 1962, several of the largest firms licensed or patented 'systems', starting 'an impressive bandwagon which smaller contractors struggled to climb aboard'. Thereafter, although he admits that the level of concentration in the building industry as a whole was (and is) very low, and that only 34% of high flats built, for instance, in London between 1967-72 were accounted for by large national firms, he is able to point to the fact that such firms were responsible for 75% of 'industrialised' high flats approved in England and Wales in the decade 1963-73. This, he concludes, demonstrates 'a quite remarkable process of concentration'.

Two types of contractual influence during the 1960s are identified: firstly, the attraction of new customers, largely smaller authorities, through 'hard-sell' techniques; secondly, the strengthening of the existing commitment to high flats of large authorities which had embarked on multi-storey programmes in the 1950s. In the first case, it might have been pertinent to mention once again the 'national local government system', and point out the subsidiary importance of many of these 'new customers' in terms of market size. Instead, Dunleavy makes it the basis of a somewhat questionable statistical claim concerning 'industrialised' multi-storey contracts from 1963-73. Taking as his starting point the unsubstantiated assumption that 'where a local authority gave contracts to only one firm, it is very likely that the initiative to introduce high-rise came from the firm rather than the authority', Dunleavy then adds up the total number of authorities (undifferentiated by size or date) which fell into this category, and concludes that 68% of all municipalities adopted 'industrialised high rise' as a result of 'contractual influence from Wimpey and Concrete together with a variety of smaller firms'. As if a minor postscript, he adds that 'a small minority of the largest housing authorities adopted industrialised high rise as a result of internal decision making'.

""
Dunleavy's analysis of the second area of potential contractual evidence, concerning large existing programmes, is more complex, but shows an equal tendency to structure its argumentation so as to marginalise inconvenient evidence. He claims that the link between 'industrialised' high flats and the further expansion of the largest cities' programmes in the mid-'60s left large firms 'increasingly in a position to demand concessions from Government and local authorities in return for their continued involvement in the public housing drive'. Dunleavy is not at all specific concerning the nature of these favours, and admits that 'to what extent these concessions affected profits is difficult to assess'. It is at this point in the argument that his case studies become of prime relevance. Here, if anywhere, the decisiveness of 'structural' pressure will be proved. We must look for conclusive evidence that contractors not only provided an indispensable buttress of expanded high-flat building, but - vitally - that they exercised a decisive role in the choice to build high flats rather than other types. In the event, however, the case studies, for all their wealth of detail, do not in fact substantiate this most crucial point. Dunleavy's most important case study - in terms of size alone - is undoubtedly that of Birmingham. Here, having selected for study an authority whose multi-storey building drive was the focus of one of Britain's most highly publicised corruption scandals, having even devoted much of his account to the juicy, if irrelevant details of that scandal, having asserted grandly that the sole cause of mid-1960s multi-storey building in Birmingham was 'Bryants' vigorous marketing' - Dunleavy is still unable to substantiate this all-important cause-effect theory with hard evidence. Not surprisingly: for only a dozen pages earlier he had unguardedly let slip the reality, that 'industrialised high rise on peripheral estates and the city centre would have been built even without Bryants' influence'. Even the statistics in this case cannot be made to work in his favour: for the period of semi-monopoly of the city's high-flat output by Bryant was associated with a gradual decline of multi-storey flats as a proportion of all housing approvals, from 59% in 1964 (immediately following the decision of the Labour Group Leader, Ald. Harry Watton, to commence the prefabricated multi-storey building drive) to 21% in 1967. 40
It is, in fact, in this Birmingham case study, in Dunleavy's account of the relationship between municipal decision-making and the building industry in Britain's second largest city, that the circularity of his use of 'factual' evidence emerges most clearly. In summing up the case study, he asserts that 'Birmingham was not dependent on a single firm. The scale of its programme would have attracted any large contractor, and several could easily have been accommodated in a competitive environment. That this did not happen was only a development and intensification of "normal" relations, however'. But what constitutes 'normal' relations has already been defined for us through generalised statistical and inferential argument before we arrive at the 'case studies'. As a result, any 'local' evidence arising from a city even the size of Birmingham, to the effect that key municipal figures such as Watton and Maudsley might have been (in Dunleavy's own phrase) 'determinant' rather than 'determined', can then be discounted as the exception that proves the rule. In short, the treatment of the case studies has (to use one of Dunleavy's own favourite expressions) been 'pre-structured'. One begins to wonder what can be the purpose of having such 'case studies' at all, if any counter-evidence emerging from them is to be marginalised or casually disregarded, as being inconsistent with "normal relations"?

Ultimately, as perhaps always in any direct comparison or confrontation between 'structuralistic' and 'factualistic' historical analyses of the same event, there seems to be difficulty even in defining any common area for discussion, let alone agreement, between the two traditions: history-writing based on the values openly claimed at the time, or subsequently, by attestable 'actors', and that which seeks always to uncover forces at work below this surface layer of decision-making. It seems to be a problematic task to reconcile the two conflicting definitions and methods of 'critical' historical investigation - on the one hand, that openly recoverable evidence should be tested against other comparable evidence, and, if sound, should be built up to form a basis for theoretical speculation; on the other, that theory is a knife with which successive layers of false 'facts' must be ruthlessly pared away to arrive at an underlying truth, already determined by scientific
historical analysis. Even in Dunleavy's own case studies, there seems to be remarkably little 'surface' evidence to support this argument of external or underlying control, and much evidence that might at first glance suggest local autonomy and power. How much 'factual' counter-evidence, at local or national level, would have been needed to shake Dunleavy's apparent conviction that concealed forces were really pulling all the strings? His concluding remarks, at any rate, have something of the character of an article of faith: 'Although at the level of observable activity many decisions influencing policy can be attributed to actors or organisations in the locality, at a more satisfactory explanatory level they can be understood as the working out of a fundamental logic of development, the determinants of which were non-local structural forces'. 50
(3) AIMS AND METHODS OF THIS ACCOUNT

It has now been demonstrated that the 1960s multi-storey building drive, far from being a 'virgin' historical subject, has already attracted a large number of researchers, resulting in several theses and at least one major book; and we have seen that these accounts, although varied in some ways, also have much in common. Having established that the present study is located not in an academic void, but in a well-established historical climate of opinion, it is now necessary to explain the purpose and methods of this study, and to point out, in particular, the ways in which it seeks to diverge from the present orthodoxy.

(a) Underlying aims

At this point, it might seem an option to embark on a lengthy Weltanschauung-exposition, setting out one's own personal values in relation to the social, political and architectural context of municipal housing as a whole, and high flats in particular. Am I 'for' or 'against' council housing, or State intervention in social matters? Do I think multi-storey blocks were, and are, a 'bad' or a 'good' idea? Certainly, it would be implausible for the contented owner of a cosy 20th-floor flat, in the highest block built by any East of Scotland local authority (Edinburgh's Martello Court), to affect absolute neutrality concerning the latter issue. And, even disregarding one's own personal circumstances, it would be preposterous to attempt to claim some kind of 'objectivity' or 'value-free' status for this thesis. My
own 'bias' originated in a very straightforward way - through an
impulse of simple historical curiosity concerning an episode which,
although recent, now seems both very remote and, at the same time (in
comparison with the story of housing today), extraordinarily dramatic.
It seemed a considerable challenge to attempt to analyse
a period some of whose values had been violently rejected, others of
which are still with us. This might seem an impossible or inadmissible
aim: surely the historian should instead wait until many more years, and
several further swings of public and professional opinion, had occurred,
before even daring to approach a contentious recent subject such
as this? Perhaps, but by no means certainly, a more balanced evaluation
might then be possible - but the opportunity would have been lost to
make use of the direct personal testimony of key individuals involved,
many of whom are still alive today; the physical evidence of the
buildings, too, might largely have been lost through wholesale
alteration, even demolition.

This initial sense of curiosity led me on to investigate existing
accounts of the building of high flats - and this, in its turn, provided
a second and more pressing motive for embarking on an investigation of
the subject now, rather than later: a sense of considerable
dissatisfaction with what we have seen to be the almost uniformly
hostile attitudes, and conclusions, of these commentators.
This dissatisfaction began as an incoherent feeling of irritation that such an enormous enterprise as the provision and retention of over 6,000 high blocks of flats, in urban areas right across Britain, could be subject to a blanket condemnation - labelled 'a bad thing' as a whole and in all its details.

But it is, of course, far beyond the scope of a limited account such as this to tackle every aspect of high flats, past, present and future! This account focuses on their past - on their construction in the 1950s and 1960s - and thus challenges only some critics of high blocks: namely, historian-critics. Historians have complemented others' denunciations of the alleged present-day deficiencies of multi-storey living, by their own claims that high blocks' initial construction, too, was characterised by base motives or 'dystopian' values. Condemnation of the building of high flats has been comparatively muted in the accounts of 'structuralist' historians - by whom, after all, any policy of the 'capitalist State' (such as to build high flats, or, equally, not to build them) is liable to be even-handedly interpreted as evidence of
exploitation of the working classes. Much more vehement attacks were found in architectural-utopian accounts, whose 150-year-old conventions of polarised debate, since Pugin's 'Contrasts', have insisted on the most bitter and comprehensive denunciations of the period preceding that currently in fashion at any point. In England, such architectural attacks against flats were further reinforced by a persistent underlying trend within housing utopianism, which ran slightly counter to the main pattern of violent fluctuation: praise of small-scale cottage housing and condemnation of large-scale, monumental blocks.

Disquiet at the blanket condemnation of multi-storey blocks in recent historical accounts was compounded by some of these authors' sometimes superficial and, worse, self-confirming use of evidence - a tendency to which utopian commentators, with their leanings towards rhetoric and polemic, seemed particularly susceptible, but which was also found in the economic/class-based accounts (see for instance the discussion of Dunleavy's use of evidence: above, pp. 33-5). I concluded that the only way to break free of this 'vicious circle' was to try, through vigorous investigation of primary evidence, to discover the motives and values which really motivated the multi-storey building drive - to try to let the period 'speak for itself' as far as possible, without either
resorting to an overall condemnation or conspiracy theory or, for that matter, idealising high flats as a new past Utopia, like tenements and terrace houses before them.
If the principal aim of this thesis is to recover and define the values and actions which underlay the 1960s multi-storey boom, it must concern itself with the activities both of those who made the formal decisions to build high flats - chiefly municipal housing committees and supporting officers - and of those who potentially influenced those decisions, such as Central Government officials and politicians, other professional groups, and industrial interests. Although, as stated above, it does not attempt a general enquiry into the nature and structure of municipal decision-making in general, the acts of municipal decision-makers are nevertheless at the heart of the project. The central question is concerned with the balance of power between the municipal groups and any external forces: to what extent was the formal power of the housing committee councillors real, or a fiction?

In the course of the main account, an answer to this question emerges, little by little. The thesis progressively focuses in on the actual decisions made to build high blocks, and on the groups or organisations that made those decisions; and it probes whether or not these bodies in fact had pressing motives, and sufficient power, to embark, on their own account, on the massed construction of high flats. The eventual answer, based on intensive primary research into the activities of both municipal bodies and potential external influences, is found to be a resounding affirmative. The evidence shows that powerful cities had every reason, given their dominant values of housing 'output' and
municipal pride, to launch themselves into large-scale multi-storey building at the time that they did; and that, far from being pawns or fools, the municipal 'housing leaders' of Britain were powerful men and women with determined ideas, well able to force through their policies against Government opposition.

The central State and the professions made only one significant intervention in this story, right at the outset. An alliance of town and country planners, civil servants and some Ministers attempted to implement a policy - that of massed 'overspill' of population - which seemed to pose a serious threat to cities' political and financial autonomy. This inevitably provoked a defensive response on the part of the large municipalities. But the choice of defence - building of high flats within their boundaries - was the decision of the municipalities, selected from various options. The Government and the professions having set one key constraint of housing policy, no external or 'centralised' force was thereafter able to substantially deflect the course of events charted by the municipal 'housing crusaders'. It was the contractors and the Government that responded to the pressure of the big housebuilding cities, not the other way round. Effective 'external' pressure on municipalities only occurred in the case of smaller authorities, whose contribution was recognised by all at the time as (in Mellish's words) a mere 'spin-off' from the 'great drive' of the cities. The case of Glasgow will provide the most striking example of the relative power of 'local' and 'national' in the field of multi-storey building: no 'external' group, large contractors included, was even
remotely able to match the sheer political and organisational muscle wielded by Glasgow Corporation's Housing Committee Convener, David Gibson, and by Lewis Cross, a senior engineer responsible for site and contract negotiation.

Under this interpretation, the process of housebuilding emerges not as a sweeping movement of impersonal class forces, but as the result of unorchestrated decisions by individual patrons or groups of patrons in individual large cities; the 'national (or regional) housing drive' is seen as the sum of individual component parts, and it becomes the task of this analysis to relate these components to one another, and to rank them in order of influence. But one immediate obstacle rears up in the path of this line of argument: the apparent homogeneity, from today's perspective, of high flats across the country. How could this seemingly uniform pattern possibly have resulted from a cumulative, unorchestrated local process? The answer, we will find, is that the process may not have been orchestrated, but it did not lack a structure or a governing mechanism. This mechanism was a hierarchy of housing patronage. A few of the largest authorities set the trend going, drawing in assistance from Government and building industry. This municipal initiative created a national housing drive of multi-storey flats, into which smaller authorities were then drawn. Although this hierarchical or pyramidal structure of patronage superficially resembles Dunleavy's concept of the 'national local government system', the latter is in fact visualised as a kind of lumpen mass of local authorities responding to vaguely-defined external pressures, rather than as a process of collaboration springing from emphatic local decisions and policies. In this account, by contrast, the decentralised structure of municipal-based housing provision will be interpreted as a source of strength rather than weakness.

Within this framework, however, numerous disjunctions and tensions will be identified and emphasised — contrary to previous histories' picture of homogeneous 'State', monolithic 'housing', and identical 'featureless' blocks. Not only was there tension between central and local Government, in various forms (at its most extreme in the running
battle over housing policy between Glasgow Corporation and the Scottish Office), but there was tension between local authorities - generally between larger and middle-sized municipalities or county authorities (for instance LCC versus Metropolitan Boroughs). Even among superficially similar or adjacent cities or boroughs/burghs that did build large numbers of high flats, there were great contrasts in timing, scale and approach: for instance, between wholeheartedly production-orientated Liverpool and hesitant Manchester; and there was kaleidoscopic variety in the types of blocks built - in size, construction, appearance, plan, and all other physical respects.

Among the individuals and groups of individuals involved in housing production, there was also much variety. Yet, as we will see, this was no mere anarchic mishmash of unrelated initiatives: there was an underlying order, as far as decisions to build multi-storey flats were concerned. In this account, two groups above all others will emerge as influential within housing policy: the 'designers' and the 'producers'. The running battle between these two groups will form one of the main themes of this thesis. The 'designers', comprising architects and allied professional groups (such as engineers and sociologists), were concerned with innovation in architecture and theory; their governing values were utopian ideas such as 'good design', 'community' and 'function', and their skills were concerned with formulating and implementing theories of various kinds (aesthetic, sociological, scientific). They had been of great influence in the introduction of Modern flats to Britain in the 1940s and early '50s, and in the establishment of public architects as an influential group in authorities such as the London County Council. In the 1960s, by contrast, the Modern designers were to be elbowed aside, protesting, by the second group, the Producers: these comprised local politicians and supporting officers, whose governing value was 'output' and whose skill was that of exhortation and negotiation - in this respect merely perpetuating a tradition which had become entrenched in Britain since the beginning of large-scale municipal housebuilding in 1919. Then, at the very time that the 'producers' were embracing multi-storey blocks and starting to build them up and down the country in the 1960s, avant-
garde designers swung violently away from large Modern blocks towards completely new patterns, citing, among other justifications, the fact that high flats had been 'debased' by the 'producers'.

This final and total rejection of multi-storey housing, and eventually all Modern housing, lies outside the chronological scope of this account. The design-production split which concerns us here was that between the 1960s producers and the earlier designers they had sidelined. This clash extended to an authority-wide level, creating contrasts between powerful authorities which built many multi-storey blocks, in pursuit of unbridled output, and those, such as the LCC, Coventry or Lambeth, which built a middling number, in pursuit of ideals of Design. The physical continuity represented by the Modern high flats themselves masked a fundamental jump, even a reverse turn in aims and principles: LCC architects and sympathetic councillors such as Mrs. Evelyn Denington, for instance, were 'horrified' to see the (from their point of view) indiscriminate and unsuitable uses to which the provincial cities were putting multi-storey blocks. It is thus further confusing an already complex picture to argue, as have some historians, that the production drive represented either a 'debasement' of earlier fine architectural ideas (which would be a mere repetition of the designers' rhetoric of the time) or an architect-led exploitation of the working classes.

It will be explained below that this account places particular emphasis on extensive primary research at local level across the whole country. Such an approach provides the most copious evidence of forceful and varied municipal initiatives on housing production. In the face of this abundance of evidence, today's historical consensus, with its blanket condemnations, comes to seem artificial, to the point almost of perversity. To portray multi-storey blocks as the epitome of external 'oppression' of local 'communities', when (in the words of Dickson Mabon, a former SDD Housing Minister) they were in reality 'the symbol of local authority independence' - that is a feat of historical gymnastics hard to match! Other investigations beyond the scope of the present account could well reinforce this point. Research into the
Further research into the close interrelation between public housing and municipal power in mid 20th century Britain would undoubtedly be of the most vital historical interest. As already stated at the beginning of this Introduction, it is impossible in the present, very narrowly defined account to trace the history of the meteoric and (in international terms) freakish rise of municipal provision to ascendancy within British working-class housing. Other authors are already investigating this earlier period, and are attempting to explain how 'council housing' was able to gather momentum from very uncertain beginnings in and before 1919, to the point where parts of this country—above all, Scotland—came to be dominated by vast swathes of municipal housing unparalleled outside postwar Eastern Europe. How did big municipalities in Britain come to acquire the political power and organisational machinery, in the field of housing, which was to allow them to start and discontinue, at will, vigorous 'drives' involving radical fluctuations of building types—of which the blocks dealt with in this account are only one, if the most emphatic, example? Some, following the example of Daunton, have begun to ask fundamental questions about the origins of this great movement. Was it, as generations of housing reformers had recited, an 'inevitable' response to the 'failure' or 'collapse' of speculative working-class housebuilding—despite the fact that the same supposed problem, in most other Western countries, met with a very different response? Or was it...
nothing other than a grand historical accident, the by-product of Government decisions and social-political relations peculiar to this country? 52

The architectural historian, the historian of architectural utopianism, could add further complications to this wider investigation. Doubtless it was the fact of municipal power that made possible such sudden and wholesale fluctuations of building policy within municipal housing programmes – from cottage to tenement to multi-storey block to 'low rise high density' to terrace. But why did such fluctuations occur? Why these particular changes, and why with such vehemence at that? Might they not have been encouraged by a cultural characteristic long-established in England, and partly translated to Scotland: an assumption that violent changes in public taste and fashion concerning housing types were the norm? Certainly in most developed industrial countries (especially non-Anglo-Saxon countries), it is general practice to assume certain fixed type/location associations: large blocks of flats in inner areas, individual detached houses in outer areas. You can have one or the other, depending on your circumstances: the two are kept distinct, the choice between then is not seen as a matter for public controversy, and neither alternative is labelled 'better' or 'worse' overall. One can only speculate what might be the reaction of a resident of São Paulo or Moscow to the following typical pronouncements by British housing guru Alice Coleman: 'If houses predominate, their benign effect upon social structure may dilute the effect of isolated blocks of flats among them... No more flats should be built'. 53

A comparative study of British and other 'Western' attitudes to dwelling types would indeed be fascinating, especially if it took into consideration other closely related cultural phenomena in this country, such as the influence of the established anti-flat tradition of public comment in England, or the polarities and combative conventions of British architectural utopianism (and, for that matter, journalism and
party politics). But such a grandiose project is altogether outside the scope of this present research.
This thesis is divided into three Parts. Part I is of thematic and roughly chronological character, and contains the central argumentation. Starting in the early 1950s, the years when multi-storey flats were newly established in Britain (by LCC and other designers), it explains the way in which municipal power suddenly found itself faced with the apparent threat of wholesale, Government-endorsed land restriction and population loss; and it traces the response: adoption of high flats by a variety of authorities up and down the country. In this Part, various motives which might have influenced municipal decision-makers are evaluated, and set against various external influences or potential influences: the alliance in favour of regional planning, whose audacious advances first stirred municipal groups into action; and the Government politicians and civil servants, local and national professional groups and building contractors that assisted the municipalities' response. Throughout this Part, a cumulative picture will be built up of the municipal housing colossus under threat - a sluggish but powerful beast, stung at last into fierce defence of its territory.

Part II takes the story beyond the point of counterrattack, and describes the resulting 'production drive' across Britain at its high point - the 1960s. It takes the form of an area-by-area review of the key locations of Modern housing production in Britain. It is divided into three chapters, covering the three major national/regional traditions of public housebuilding: Scotland, with its entrenched municipal housing apparatus; the polycentric provinces of England and Wales; and London, uncertain and divided. This arrangement creates a two-tiered hierarchy: at the top, the three major components; and, within them, further contrasts between individual authorities - Newcastle versus Sunderland, Southwark versus Lambeth, Dundee versus Aberdeen, and so forth. The cumulative effect of the evidence presented in Parts I and II is to break up the monolithic bloc of 'State housing' depicted by previous accounts - in the case of Part I, into 'local' versus 'national' groupings, and, in that of Part II, into regional patterns within Scotland and England/Wales.
Parts I and II make up the great majority of the thesis. However, it is not possible simply to leave the story at its high point, in view of what was to follow within a very few years, from the late 1960s: almost complete rejection of Modern 'housing' as a whole, and in all its aspects: design as well as production. In this final revolution, the groups referred to here as 'designers' (architects and allied groups, such as journalists and sociologists) were to play perhaps the most prominent role - counterattacking from their position of relative impotence during the multi-storey boom. However, they now advocated not 'good design' of new housing, but completely new ideas: preservation of old houses, and participation by 'users'. That story, however, lies outside the strict scope of this account. What will be briefly traced, in Part III, is a parallel, or slightly later breakdown of confidence in the world of housing production: this was caused by political loss of interest in output (following success in achieving a crude housing surplus) and growth of interest in housing improvement, by the attacks of new pressure-groups such as 'Shelter', by mounting chaos in the building industry, and by the emergence of serious housing-management problems in some large new schemes - although in some places, such as Scotland, rejection was less emphatic, and high blocks were still built for several years. Here, too, local initiative was also decisive: the Government had long attempted to promote improvement, but only when local authorities and other groups were ready was it vigorously taken up.
(d) Research Method

Most previous historians of postwar housing have carried out extensive research into published sources, such as books, articles and reports by housing reformers and public or private architects, articles in newspapers, or printed minutes (such as 'Hansard' or council minutes); some accounts have also made use of interviews with key historical figures, and investigation of Government papers (more than 30 years old). A publication-orientated method of evidence-collecting is eminently reliable for the first phase of the history of multi-storey flats in Britain - their importation by avant-garde Modern architects in the 1940s and '50s - as architectural journalism lay at the heart of the Modern movement, and thus provides a highly immediate record of it. The 1960s 'drive for numbers', on the other hand, was chiefly pushed through by local politicians and technical officers unaccustomed to putting their thoughts down in published print. Reliance on published sources here might, therefore, lead in entirely the wrong direction - as in the case of Finnimore's investigation of the building process of Modern housing, which, as we have seen, took the published pronouncements of 1960s public architects as its main evidence of 'State policy' on housing construction, compared these with the reality of unbridled 'package dealing', and eventually concluded this to have been yet another case of the State attempting to disguise a continuing process of 'exploitation'.

To guard against this kind of credulous or unintentionally unbalanced conclusion, the present thesis has been based on a complex and interlocking research programme, comprising several stages. The first was to trace all relevant articles on Modern housing production, chiefly using the RIBA periodicals index. This provided an extensive but partial overview of housing production, chiefly from the standpoint of public and private professional groups (above all, architects and planners). Statistical information on housing production at national, regional and municipal level was also worked out, from a thorough scan of Government housing returns for 1945-75. Then, following successful application to DoE and SDD, a comprehensive survey was carried out of
closed Government files relating to housing and planning policy in the late 1950s and 1960s. Access to these was granted without restriction in the case of DoE, and, in Scotland, solely on condition that no individuals mentioned in the files should be named (later in the research this condition became less relevant, as the same names cropped up in interviews; many of the files meantime became 'open' through the rolling 30-year limit). This established a more accurate view of Government policymaking as essentially ancillary to the great drive of the big cities, and showed that many pronouncements and cherished concepts of architects and other professional groups (such as 'mixed development' or 'open systems') had comparatively little relevance to the practical business of organising housing output.

Having acquired a fairer idea of the key values underlying the production drive at national level, and of the broad relationship between national and local agencies, a further extensive programme of research at local level was commenced. All multi-storey blocks of public housing in Britain were identified, visited, photographed and plotted on maps, along with numbers, heights of blocks and dwellings; certain historical statistics on each were researched, by visiting all relevant local history libraries/record offices; overall statistical tables were computed; and a gazetteer of all these was compiled. The compilation of the gazetteer (not itself included in this thesis) formed part of a joint research programme with Stefan Muthesius of East Anglia University. This gave a useful background familiarity with the physical aspects of a subject which, after all, is concerned with the spread of a particular building type. In the course of this research in local history archives, the housing (and other relevant committee) minutes of virtually all authorities which built high flats were scanned for background information on multi-storey building policy; in the case of some of the most important (especially Glasgow Corporation, Birmingham Corporation, the LCC and the GLC), files and papers were also investigated in detail.

Finally, a very wide range of individual figures (over 100 in number) who had emerged in the files as having been involved in multi-storey
housing production, was contacted and interviewed, over a period of 18 months (some in joint interviews with Stefan Muthesius: for details see separate list). Potential interviewees were selected both for their individual importance, and also to obtain an adequate 'spread' of all the key groups involved in housing production - ranging from local councillors, architects and planners to civil servants, Government Ministers and staff of building contractors. No standard set of questions was used on these occasions: as these interviews came at the end of an extensive programme of primary source research, 'tailor made' questions seemed potentially much more productive. In most cases a rough note-form 'dossier' of background information on the individual and his/her work was prepared, along with key questions: each interview was opened by inviting a 'potted account' of the individual's career, following which any key questions or areas not by then covered were picked off: any unexpected information was followed up in more detail, as seemed appropriate. These interviews in almost all cases simply confirmed the general picture already formed from the files, merely adding colourful and often direct language and personal detail. One example was the unobtrusive but central role of the engineer Lewis Cross in Glasgow's housing drive: this, although not mentioned at all in published sources (such as Corporation reports), became quite clear in the Glasgow and Government files, and was confirmed and embroidered in interviews with figures such as the Wimpey architect Tom Smyth.
COMPARISON WITH OTHER ACCOUNTS

So far, we have traced the existing historical consensus on this subject, and then outlined the broad guiding principles of the present account. To round off the Introduction, it now seems useful, despite the risk of repetition, to attempt a more direct comparison of the potential strengths and weaknesses of this thesis with those of recent accounts, in respect both of basic values, and of evidence and analysis.

(a) Values, aims

At the most basic level, there might seem to be difficulty in making any useful comparison or connection between the generally 'positive' approach of this account, which seeks to recover past values and motivations without a presupposition of 'blame' or 'failure', and the conceptions of most previous histories of Modern housing: the two at times appear to exist almost in different worlds. Nevertheless, it is in fact possible to identify some very general differences.

Among previous histories, the structuralist accounts have the potential strength of seeing through surface pretexts to possible underlying motives, and of openly counterbalancing any unconscious bias towards the political-economic-social status quo. The moral and social forcefulness of the utopian accounts, on the other hand, often gives their argumentation a compelling passion. Also, utopianism's holistic quality reinforces the apparent comprehensiveness of its explanations; and, through its reliance on past-present bad-good polarisations, enables its supposedly historical accounts to nevertheless 'borrow' much of the easy acceptability of today's orthodoxies - as in the case of Ravetz's history of Modern planning, which is largely in fact composed of today's rhetoric of 'user participation'. The corresponding danger is that any predetermined search for underlying structures may lead to an unworldly academicism, blind to the reality of both general causes and individual facts; and that the holistic strength and close present-day ties of utopianism may lead to gross anachronisms, to 'history' writing which will (or should) only be of use to the historian of today's thinking,
and which indeed might itself constitute a kind of mistreatment of a hapless subject, by those supposedly opposed to 'exploitation' in all its forms.

Conversely, the 'bias' of this account towards recovery and re-enactment of the values and aims of the time through a (very intensive) investigation of primary evidence, has the potential advantage of seeing the past world for what it was, in accordance with its own frame of values, and avoiding any sophistic rejection of 'obvious', 'face value' or 'common sense' explanations. The corresponding risk is of a myopic and indiscriminate antiquarianism, unable to see the wood for the trees or to distinguish between typical and atypical, significant and insignificant, and incapable of discerning general trends and explanations. There is also a danger of a gullible acceptance of 'Establishment' thinking in general, and, in particular, of the rhetoric of the past, however faulty or dishonest that might have been even in the terms of the day; and there is a risk of an equally naive rejection of perfectly legitimate present-day interpretations or complaints resulting from the clear and direct consequences of the past actions under study. In practical terms, the most immediate difficulty, already stated, is presented by the (to present-day eyes) homogeneous appearance of the multi-storey blocks themselves. How could this building type have spread across the country so fast, without some kind of central coordination? For an explanation we must turn to the evidence.

(b) Method, evidence, analysis

It rapidly became clear, in researching a complex story of this kind, that meaningful answers could only be provided by the most intensive investigation of contemporary primary sources. Previous historians mostly relied on a comprehensive overview of certain categories of 'national' sources. Thus Owens explains, concerning her thesis, that 'the government attitude to mixed development has been investigated through housing manuals and design guides, parliamentary debates and legislation and subsidies'. Having established the attitudes of that monolith, the 'State', the latter's local interventions are then normally traced.
through case studies. In Dunleavy's case, for example, consideration of published sources and key interviews at national level was followed by the three local case studies, each supported by a scan of council minutes and key interviews. In this way, such accounts substantiate their argument that powerful national groupings in some way controlled or exploited the 'locals': from that point, connections are sometimes eventually made back up to broader theories (as in the case of Dunleavy).

As has already been stated, this thesis does not directly enter into the last area of discussion, by attempting to relate its conclusions to general theories of political or social science or history, such as theories of municipal decision-making, theories of the 'ideology' of the Welfare State, or even 'theories of the State' as a whole. Its area of contention begins immediately below these overarching debates, and stretches down to the most local and empirical level - roughly the same area investigated by most previous analyses. If its evidence, and resulting conclusions, was to stand comparison with these latter interpretations, this thesis must investigate both national and local sources, and preferably in greater depth in both cases. Otherwise it could always be argued that, however convincing any causes identified, there were still more powerful forces lurking in the background, which were not, and could not be, discovered by research confined to (in Dunleavy's words) 'the level of observable activity'. Two aspects of this counter-argument appeared particularly potent, even though not supported by particularly 'hard' evidence in either Dunleavy's or Finnimore's case: the claim that strings were being pulled by hidden circles in and around Central Government, such as senior official architects (as argued by Finnimore); and the claim, made most forcefully by Dunleavy, that pressure (often corrupt) from building contractors determined the actions of local councillor-puppets.

These and similar arguments are chiefly answered by the integrated national-local structure of the analysis, by the breadth of coverage, encompassing all key areas, and by the depth of primary source research. Previous claims that group X or Y exerted such-and-such an influence
within Central Government, and that these ideas were then imposed on the locals, could then be tested against the wealth of first-rate evidence deriving from the Government files and follow-up interviews; these provided vital insights into the balance of power and the course of housing and planning policy within the Government, and into the interrelation between these processes and the municipal sphere (for instance, in the matter of subsidies). The 'corrupt builders' argument, although by its very nature apparently irrefutable (as it seemed unlikely that direct evidence of corruption, outside well-known court cases, could ever be unearthed through academic research), was tested by a combination of careful chronological argumentation (which demonstrated that large contractors' interest was only aroused by an established demand) and detailed primary evidence concerning negotiating policy in the most forceful authorities, which showed their municipal officials held the whip hand over the contractors.

One of the most powerful weapons of previous historians, in attempting to prove at local level the influence of their particular bogeyman-group, has been the detailed case study. Originally, the research for this thesis was focused on a very large and important case study, that of Glasgow Corporation's massive multi-storey drive in the 1960s, but before long the decision was taken to abandon this approach, and instead to attempt the rather more difficult task of comprehensive local-level coverage. This was done by researching all multi-storey developments at a basic level, and then homing in to investigate in detail (through documentary research and interviews) the policies of all the foremost production authorities, with the exception only of a few second-rank cities (such as Nottingham, Plymouth, Cardiff or Southampton). This broad-front process of research proved self-strengthening, not least by revealing that some previous authors' case-study choices were atypical, even absurd: for instance Finnmore's selection of those two isolated bastions of architect power, the LCC and Coventry CBC, to test his theory that architects controlled the public housebuilding process! Two of the three case studies supporting Dunleavy's 'contractual influence' argument were also found to be distinctly misleading, both in their own characteristics and in their
tendentious use of evidence. These were West Ham/Newham, where the Borough Architect's design-dominated policies fatally weakened his negotiating position, and where the Ronan Point disaster also occurred (its largely irrelevant aftermath being related in lavish detail by Dunleavy), and Birmingham (where a blow-by-blow rehearsal of the Maudsley corruption case was trailed across a somewhat selective account of the City's housing policy).

By contrast, the hopefully more comprehensive nature of this study at local level, when combined with its in-depth research at Government level, made possible an evaluation of one city against another, one region against another — without ever letting the national picture slip out of view. Local variations and diversity could be discovered, while avoiding, as much as possible, the charge of myopic antiquarianism. The extensiveness of the local research provided a sound basis for selection of nationally significant local examples, for conclusions that this or that authority was the foremost example of this or that policy — building of package-deal blocks, building of deck access blocks, aversion to deck access blocks, tolerance of overspill, determination to resist LCC hegemony, and so forth. Even in the case of the dominant theme of the entire thesis — multi-storey building production — one preeminent example was identified: the massive multi-storey drive undertaken by Glasgow Corporation itself. It almost goes without saying that, had the original proposal to study Glasgow merely as a case study, rather than as part of a comprehensive national overview, been pursued, this resounding conclusion would not have been possible: it could only emerge from a careful comparison of all the largest and most vigorous municipal housing programmes of our period.
Because of the unusual nature of the source material, dominated by non-published primary sources and interview extracts, the references have mostly been consolidated into composite footnotes covering entire paragraphs of text: as a result, quotations from interviews are, where there is ambiguity, introduced by short key extracts. The general model for this pattern of footnoting has been that adopted in the most authoritative recent history of a postwar 'social' building-type: Andrew Saint's account of postwar schools, Towards A Social Architecture (1987). To save space, I have not specifically footnoted assertions in the text concerning output levels (including per-capita or comparative figures) in particular regions or cities: these are invariably derived from Government Housing Returns/Statistics and from the Gazetteer. The word 'Minutes' has also, in general, been omitted: the institution's name, and date of meeting, are supplied. In quotations from Government files, correspondents are identified by initials (e.g. EAS = Dame Evelyn Sharp). For other abbreviations see main List.

FOOTNOTES: INTRODUCTION


2 AR, 11-1967.


5 Taylor, p. 28-9.


7 Taylor, p. 75.

8 Taylor, pp. 62, 64.

9 Taylor, pp. 23-4.

10 Taylor, p. 11.

14 Ravetz, pp. 56, 39.
16 Ravetz, pp. 54, 57.
17 'Any kind': Ravetz, p. 93; 'mechanisms': p. 13; 'ultimate contradiction': p. 155; 'cosmopolitan', p. 273; 'gadgetry', p. 147; 'idealised image', p. 272; Mao 'mass consensus', p. 265.
18 Ravetz, p. 213, 181.
19 E. R. Scoffham, The Shape of British Housing, 1984, pp. 68 ('building of images'), 231 (message for housing).
22 Finnimore thesis (contractors), pp. 88-120; (councils), pp. 150-4.
24 Finnimore, pp. 370-1.
26 Owens, p. 337.
27 Owens, pp. 352 (only became necessary), 414 (masking), 425 (Birmingham), 424 (Liverpool).
28 Owens, p. 428 (imaginative avant garde), p. 427 (take over the whole job).


32 R. McCutcheon, 'High Flats in Britain 1945 to 1971', in M. Edwards and others (eds.), *Political Economy and the Housing Question*, 1975, p. 96 (impact of LCC); p. 92 (favoured large firms); p. 98 (package deals especially welcome to small towns). Also R. McCutcheon, *High Flats in Britain* (M Sc, Sussex University), 1971.


34 'Concretion'; Merrett, p. 128. 'Hidden thread': p. 129. 'Degree of monopoly': p. 129. 'Underpinned by... big capital': p. 130.


37 Bacon, pp. 10, 11.


40 'The architectural profession...': p. 106.

41 'More determined than determinant': p. 351.

42 'Higher level authorities': p. 124.


47 'Hard-sell': p. 313. Statistical argument about 'industrialised high rise': pp. 130, 133.

48 'To what extent these concessions...': p. 120. 'Bryants' vigorous marketing': p. 350. 'Industrialised high rise...': p. 337. 'Birmingham was not dependent...': p. 350. Decline in proportion of high flats: p. 262.

49 'Birmingham was not dependent': p. 350.

50 'Fundamental logic of development': p. 346.


53 Coleman, pp. 103, 171.

54 Collaboration with Stefan Muthesius of East Anglia University: From 1983-6, the work of David Percival, Norwich City Architect, was jointly researched and a booklet entitled Provincial Mixed Development was published in 1986. Subsequently, Stefan Muthesius has researched Modern housing design (a subject which is contiguous with that of this thesis: housing production), and there has been much exchange of ideas at the interface of the two areas: it is hoped to publish, possibly in 1992 (by Yale University Press), a joint book on postwar Modern housing. There has also been collaboration in the production of a Gazetteer (not itself included in this submission, but used as part of the calculation of some of the statistical appendices): SM did the research for East Anglia and some other towns, MH the remainder. Some of the interviews were also joint (asterisked in list of interviewees' names).
PART I: A MUNICIPAL CRUSADE: MODERN FLATS AND THE DEFENCE OF HOUSING PRODUCTION

'If we can... create throughout the country the spirit of a housing crusade, then I believe we may dare to cherish great hopes.'  H. Macmillan

'To someone coming out of the slums of the Gorbals or Leith - and I was born in a tenement in Leith - the idea of going into a house with a bathroom, a proper kitchen, hot water - it was the millennium for them, it was their dream, and it didn't matter a b... to them if it was in a multi-storey block or a cottage - they wanted as many dwellings as quickly as possible!'  R. D. Cramond

'In those days, in the 'sixties, when you went and opened a block of flats the Council had just built, when you walked around and inspected it, you felt proud of what you were giving people!'  Cllr. A. King

During the 1940s and 1950s, the types of dwellings and blocks previously dominant within new public housing in the urban areas of Britain were progressively replaced by a completely new pattern. Programmes comprising tenements and balcony-access flats, or, in suburban locations, two-storey cottages, increasingly gave way to projects of Modern blocks of flats, freely disposed in open layouts. Most prominent in these new schemes were multi-storey blocks, sometimes used in combination with lower blocks, sometimes on their own.

Before the war, architectural commentators in the vanguard of the International Modern movement in Britain, such as Yorke and Gibberd, had advocated application of Modern design principles, avowedly based on precise 'need-fit' planning and social research, to the working-class housing problem; their declared aim was to provide light, air, greenery and internal mod. cons. to all. In the wartime years and the late 1940s, the first tentative attempts were made to put these sweeping ideals into practice, particularly in the context of the reconstruction of London: some 'progressive' boroughs sponsored avant-garde schemes of Modern flats (notably Westminster's Pimlico competition, won by the
young architects Powell and Moya), and the London County Council's planners launched into the replanning of a blitzed swathe of the boroughs of Stepney and Poplar, whose showpiece was the Lansbury development. Modern design of public housing only gained a kind of national currency, however, after 1950: following a controversy fanned by the architectural press, responsibility for design of all the LCC's new housing schemes was transferred back to the Architect, Robert Matthew, from the Director of Housing and Valuer, Cyril Walker, to whom it had temporarily been assigned after the war. We shall return to discuss Walker's work shortly. From the viewpoint of Modern architects, the recovery of control of the design of the LCC's vast programme provided an unprecedented national platform for the propagation of Modern design in public housing: throughout the 1950s, a series of prestigious schemes, such as those at Roehampton, were given wide publicity by the architectural press, encouraging the spread of Modern patterns to the provinces.

By the end of the 1950s, the servicing and architectural problems of high blocks had been tackled and seemed to have been resolved: on these foundations, architects were now building further Modern values and images, such as 'urbanity'.

As stated in the Introduction, the subject of this thesis is the period which followed the establishment of Modern public housing in the 1940s and '50s: the period of the large-scale building of Modern dwellings, essentially from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. Here there is a major difference in emphasis from the earlier phase. This account cannot deal in any detail with the early 'heroic' (from the architects' viewpoint) period. However, summed up briefly, it may be said that the 1940s and 1950s were the years when Modern dwellings were devised by housing reformers, designed by architects and built as advanced showpiece developments; this pattern was exemplified by the LCC, whose highly individualistic groups of architects enjoyed almost unrestricted autonomy in research and design, with the full blessing of Housing Committee councillors. During this initial phase in the evolution of Modern public housing, there had been more formulation and advocacy of
theories than building of actual dwellings. And architects' debates about 'community design' could appear to lead even further away from action and production. It is not possible in this brief account to trace or analyse these theorising: instead, it is necessary to take 'Modern dwellings' and 'Modern housing', with all their sociological and architectural complexities, as an established building form.

This thesis deals with the subject of dwelling provision pure and simple. Here one finds a different set of issues and values: urgent local political demands, financial and organisational constraints and initiatives, lobbying, negotiating, monitoring, pressurising. These were subsumed under the one single, all-encompassing aim of 'output', or 'production': the latter word is not used here in its more general economic sense ('production' versus 'consumption'), but purely refers to the idea, and process, of large-scale building of new dwellings - of building procurement, as it were. Increasingly, the pace was set by different groups from the designers and reformers of the 'forties and early 'fifties: above all, 'crusading' councillors, pursuing the local-political aim of safeguarding municipal patronage powers of housebuilding and letting; and production-minded engineers or architects of local authorities or contractors, serving their political or commercial masters through efficient pursuit of output. The relative simplicity of their aim was reflected in the appearance of many schemes built in the great 'production drive' of the late 1950s and 1960s. Now, most high blocks were built not in the context of the complicated architectural solutions favoured by the LCC designers - above all, the 'mixed development' in which high blocks were offset by cottages and lower-height flats - but as isolated multi-storey groups, placed on any kind of site, urban or suburban.

Of course, the two values of 'production' and 'design' remained closely bound up with one another during this period. Only during those years was it taken for granted that new public housing would be both copious in quantity, and Modern in external appearance, construction, and internal equipment. However, there was, at the same time, a strong divergence of interests. In fact, the LCC's pioneering stable of
architects in the early 1950s had first established their authority by attacking the output aims of the Valuer's programme. Now, with output firmly in the saddle, the converse applied. In cities such as Glasgow, 'designers' acted chiefly as technical assistants to the driving councillors and organising officials. Not surprisingly, this new balance of power was to lead to fresh conflicts between designers and producers.
THE PRODUCTION TRADITION

Large-scale production was, however, no novelty within the field of public housing, any more than was the involvement of designers and associated professional groups. The establishment of housing output as one of the chief yardsticks of achievement for the new municipal housing organisations, after the destruction of the private housing market in World War I, had been followed by several waves of high production across the country. Part I of this thesis traces the links which became established, during the 1950s and early 1960s, between urban housing production and Modern flats. But much of the groundwork for this had been accomplished in the interwar and early postwar years, by those authorities which erected large numbers of flats of broadly 'traditional' tenemental types. It is outside the scope of this account to attempt a general analysis, or comparison, of the cyclical patterns of housing production after 1919 and after 1945: these each comprised a burst of general-needs building followed by 're-balancing' towards slum-clearance and then (in the post-World War II case) housing improvement. It is, however, relevant to point out that, between the wars, a fundamental difference over the building of flats (as in many other areas of housing production) had already arisen within Britain, between Scotland on the one hand and England and Wales on the other.

In Scotland, the tenement tradition remained an enduring influence, although under attack by reformers. The influential 1917 Report of a Royal Commission set up to investigate slum conditions had attacked the tenement flat in extravagant terms, and had recommended the general building of cottages by the State. Thereafter existing tenements had been pushed into a cycle of decline, and flats had been stigmatised generally, by the State's combination of rent control with a differential building policy: cottages or two-storey 'four-in-a-block' flats for skilled and lower-middle-class tenants, and spartan tenemental estates for slum-clearance rehousees. Glasgow Corporation, for instance, built 13,756 'Rehousing' tenements between the wars. But the 1920s and 1930s had also seen the beginnings of an official revaluation of the tenement, with Edinburgh's City Architect, Ebenezer MacRae,
repudiating cottages and calling for a 'return to the old Scots
traditional form of building', and the Government-sponsored 'Highton
Report' (1935) praising contemporary Continental flats. After World War
II, as we will see below, there would be a renewed boom in tenement
construction. (Ills. 1, 2) And the production-orientated
characteristics of this phase, in its turn, were to be perpetuated in
the energetic Modern flat-building of the 1960s.

In England and Wales, on the other hand, interwar council housing
production was dominated by suburban cottage estates: slum-clearance and
large-scale flat-building only really took hold in the 1930s, in London
and a few large provincial centres such as Liverpool. In the capital,
responsibility for clearance and building was divided between the London
County Council and the second-tier authorities, the Metropolitan
Boroughs. This arrangement was to cause much friction in the 1950s and
early 1960s, but the autocratic Labour LCC administration of Herbert
Morrison maintained an easy dominance during the mid and late 1930s.
During this period, the Council built large schemes of flats in slum-
clearance areas and cottages in the outer suburbs: the flats comprised
balcony or staircase access 'block dwellings' up to five or even six
storeys in height, and in styles (such as neo-Georgian) considered
'modern' under inter-war criteria. Only a few of the more precocious
Labour boroughs, such as Bermondsey, attempted much flat-building.

Immediately following World War II, it seemed at first that the interwar
balance of power and activity in London housing production would be
maintained. The LCC's decision in January 1946, as a matter of
expediency, to concentrate responsibility for design and erection of its
new housing in the hands of the Director of Housing and Valuer paid
rapid dividends. Within four years, through Walker's administrative
efficiency, the avoidance of 'flights of fancy' and the use of
cautiously-improved prewar patterns, 19,171 dwellings had been completed
and a further 51,436 were approved or under construction. The flats
which made up 44% of this total were traditional 'block dwellings',
usually of four or five storeys in height; but now a few blocks were
extended above six storeys for the first time.
The Scottish production tradition. Glasgow, Castlemilk Unit 1, Area 0: view (1989) of type T6/4 tenement, built 1954.
2 Castlemilk, Unit 1: plans of type T/6/4, 1953.
But Walker was also able to impose his production-orientated values and preferred housing patterns on London's lower-tier housing authorities, the Metropolitan Boroughs, as a result of the Ministry's delegation to the LCC, up to 1950, of responsibility for loan-sanction vetting of the boroughs' projects; and the latter achieved 8,819 completions by the end of 1949. In his scrutiny of these programmes, characteristically referred to by the LCC as 'local housing operations', Walker was ruthless in demanding that the full, concentric County of London Plan densities be achieved. He insisted on the use of 3-storey flats rather than cottages in suburbs such as Camberwell, and secured increases in the storey-heights of block dwellings in inner boroughs. Experimental high blocks of a similar tenemental pattern to Woodberry Down were built by several boroughs: such schemes included those at Abbott Road, Poplar, Agnes Place, Southwark, and Notre Dame Estate, Wandsworth. * (Ills. 3, 4)

During the late 1940s, under Walker's pressure, even the most organisationally conservative Metropolitan Boroughs became accustomed for the first time to the idea of large-scale production of flats. Whereas only the most determined authorities, such as Bermondsey and Woolwich, had been able to carve out substantial programmes of several thousand dwellings before the war, now several others were intent on emulating them. By 1950, for instance, Shoreditch, Hackney, and Wandsworth were energetically building block dwellings, some of six or more storeys height. At the same time a few English cities, and a number of Scottish authorities, had commenced or recommenced the construction of similar block dwellings. But by this date, of course, the LCC, along with several boroughs (such as Finsbury, Paddington and Westminster) and New Towns, had already fallen under the influence of designers rather than the advocates of production; and they were now building or planning the first substantial schemes of Modern high flats, in conscious contrast to the established production of block dwellings or tenements. Thus the 'heroic' phase of establishment of the Modern Movement in housing overlapped substantially with late and vigorous bursts of production of stylistically old-fashioned types of housing. *
Late '40s block dwellings built by Metropolitan Boroughs: Shoreditch MBC, Bracklyn Street Area Block 1 (Linale House), erected from 1948.
Wandsworth MBC, Notre Dame Estate 3rd Stage: two 8-storey blocks, and lower ranges, built from 1949.
It was only later in the 1950s that the first steps were taken in the adaptation of Modern flats themselves for the same production-orientated purposes as Walker's block dwellings and Glasgow Corporation's tenements - a process which forms the chief subject of Part I of this thesis. This story, it should be emphasised from the very beginning, is overwhelmingly urban in character - with over 90% of multi-storey flats (of six or more storeys) located in large burghs, county boroughs or Greater London. Now the types which the LCC designers had advocated as an antidote to Walker's production use of block dwellings were themselves embraced by Walker-like officials, and councillor 'housing crusaders', up and down the country; and they were used in ways which were completely unacceptable to, and vehemently criticised by, the LCC designers and their councillor supporters such as Mrs. Evelyn Denington. The production-dominated building of Modern flats, in contexts such as the 'package deal' contract (designed and built by the contractor's staff), required the intimate involvement of many 'designers' in the technical sense - local authority engineers to identify and lay out the sites, contractors' architects, engineers and quantity surveyors to design and superintend the erection of the blocks - yet this activity would not have been acknowledged as 'design' by the LCC architects.

The role of Modern multi-storey flats in the process of translation from 'design' values to 'production' values only differed from that of previous architectural patterns of housing, such as neo-Georgian, in their unprecedented suitability for the rapid exploitation of gap sites. The chief divergence from previous phases of production, as will be explained later in this account, was instead to come at the very end of the story in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the inevitable turn of professional fashion against Modern flats and traditional Welfare-State 'provision' coincided with an unprecedented glut of new public housing, and a collapse in support for the very idea of 'production'.

We saw in the Introduction that most recent historians have argued that high flats were 'imposed' on local 'communities' by external forces. It will be argued in the following pages that the truth was very different - that multi-storey building was an expression of local
municipal power, rather than an attack on it. Indeed, one of the main reasons for the translation of Modern flats from design to production purposes was the urgent desire of some municipalities to defend their power against the perceived threat posed by one powerful 'national' group of designers, the town planning profession.

The story related in this thesis starts, in Britain, with a powerful, Government-supported challenge to the well-established structure of local-authority housing provision, during the 1940s. This challenge set up a 'land trap' for local authorities, by curbing their land supply, and thus threatening their autonomy in housing policy. It took two loosely-associated forms, both trying to turn away from 'mere' local housebuilding to a town-planning conception of housing as part of some wider process of reconstruction or modernisation. The less contentious of the two policies was an energetic resumption of slum-clearance from the mid-1950s; this was linked, in England and Wales only, with a curb on local-authority development of suburban sites. This policy will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Much more threatening for local authorities was the second policy: an attempt by town planners and others interested in the 'rational' reconstruction of Britain, to place planning constraints on development of urban housing land, and to force cities to 'overspill' many of those displaced by slum-clearance.

This nationally orchestrated challenge, during the 1940s and 1950s, established broad constraints on the choices available to British local authorities on housing policy. But it did not dictate or determine their response. For the officially preferred policy, a combination of slum-clearance and large-scale planned overspill of industry and working-class housing, was not, in most cases, significantly pursued: there was much population loss from cities during the 1950s and 1960s, but mostly in the form of 'unplanned overspill' of the mobile middle classes. Instead, powerful local authorities determinedly set about the task of keeping control of their own housing destinies, by combining slum-clearance with a building policy abhorrent to Government-endorsed decentralism: the massed development of multi-storey flats within their
own boundaries, using one element of the LCC mixed development formula in a manner antithetical to that of the LCC designers, and more akin to Walker's use of his block dwellings for 'site cramming'.

Thus what actually triggered off the Modern housing drive of the 1950s and 1960s in Britain was not the 'land trap' itself, but the particular response chosen by the municipalities, in their opposition to the Government's pressure for nationally-planned and orchestrated reconstruction. And, once established, high-flat building was taken up for uses divorced from its original association with perceived land shortage - for instance in Dundee, where it permitted the rapid exploitation of plentiful suburban land.

This thesis does not systematically consider the role of 'ideology' in housing production, or attempt to differentiate sharply among values, between 'pretexts' and 'concealed motives'. However, some differences of this sort will emerge. It will be found that the rhetoric employed by councillors at the time emphasised 'crusading' moral aims, such as 'housing the people' or 'banishing the disgrace of the slums'. Evidence drawn from the present-day recollections of councillors and officials concerning their actual motives, on the other hand, suggests that considerations of municipal power, independence and prestige, (notably the retention of population and rate revenue) in many cases provided the chief incentive to build large numbers of Modern flats within their cities' boundaries. It is not possible systematically to evaluate the respective influences of these two groups of values and influences, as there was no systematic procedure at the time for the canvassing of the opinions of those to be housed or rehoused.

This account's focus on the great power wielded by councillor 'crusaders' and official 'organisers' in the largest authorities represents a sharp divergence from the theory of decision-making in housing provision put forward by recent historians, such as Dunleavy, Owens or Finнимore, which, we have seen, emphasises the power exerted by other groups or 'actors' (the national architectural or planning professions, or building contractors), and correspondingly portrays
local groups and individuals as weak and exploited. Here, on the other hand, the decentralised nature of decision-making in British public housing is interpreted as a source of strength, enabling driving 'housing leaders', set on output expansion, to emerge at local level among both members and officers. In the same way that the activities of the LCC Architect's Department were of paramount significance in the initial introduction of Modern flats, so this story will be dominated by the policies and initiatives of the municipal 'housing crusaders'. In tracing the spread of the multi-storey adventure across the whole of Britain, we will uncover such a wealth of near-unconstrained decision-making by these 'crusaders', as to cast in a highly implausible and artificial light any 'top-down' interpretation alleging external determination. Most decisive and autonomous of all, perhaps, were the acts of those who unleashed the most dramatic high-flat initiative of all - the multi-storey crash drive of the city of Glasgow during the 1960s. Here, commentary will hardly be necessary, so clearly emerges the subordination or impotence of 'national' groups (architects, planners, civil servants or contractors) in the face of the overwhelming negotiating and organising power wielded by two 'local' figures: the Corporation's Housing Committee Convener, Councillor David Gibson, and the engineer Lewis Cross, 'Housing Progress Officer' in charge of sites and contracts.

As was pointed out in the Introduction, this account contrasts starkly with the simplicity of many preceding historical accounts, which claim the exercise of power in housing provision to have been directed towards homogeneous, if not crudely simplistic aims of economic, political and social exploitation. The production-orientated campaigns of the 1960s local 'housing crusaders' were not only complex in themselves, but arose in an existing context of great intricacy: the debates and theorisings concerning housing among architects and other reformers in the 1940s and 1950s. The LCC's large mixed developments of the mid and late 'fifties, and Glasgow's massive 'package deal' schemes of the mid and late 'sixties, in many cases, employed physically similar Modern multi-storey blocks; and both represented the large-scale exercise of 'State power' in public housing provision. Yet the driving values of the LCC
architects and the Glasgow 'housing crusaders', in some ways, could hardly have been more different!

But even if some historians, today, should choose to view the municipal response to the 'housing problem' as an impersonal matter of power and class, councillors at the time could afford no such detachment, in the face of the queues of constituents that formed every day outside their houses or 'surgeries', urgently demanding rehousing and a council tenancy: 'An endless stream of older women... all with the same question: "When's ma hoose comin' down?"' Motherwell's then Housing Convener, Hutchison Sneddon, recalls that 'I used to come home every night to my house and they were queuing up the top of the stair and round again. I had a two-room tenement flat, and one of those rooms was totally used for interviews! My wife and I, in our first house, never had a meal without a visitor there! People just came to your house at 9 a.m., 9 p.m., whenever they wanted. Always the question was the same. "When am I going to get my house? When am I going to get rehoused?"'
FOOTNOTES: PART I, INTRODUCTION

1 'If we can': Harold Macmillan, speech in House of Commons, 13-11-1951; 'To someone': int. Cramond; 'In those days': int. King.


7 Dunleavy, p. 184 (system of actors), p. 188 (fragmentation of decision-making allowed 'penetration and capture... by a sectional economic interest').

8 'Endless stream': int. Samuel. 'I used to come home': int. Sneddon.
CHAPTER 1: THE LAND TRAP: HIGH FLATS VERSUS OVERSPILL

During the years immediately after World War II, the housing land supply of local municipalities became the target for a range of restrictive, Government-endorsed policies. Of these, the most serious were those imposed under the heading of town and country planning. This chapter will examine this seemingly grave threat to the cities' autonomy in housing, and will show that they seized energetically on the building of multi-storey flats as a way out of this 'land trap'.

Between the wars, there had been no systematic official attempt to curb the supply of suburban land available for public housing construction in Britain. Rather, it was the visual impact of speculative housebuilding in the South-East of England which had provoked the first Government action: the 1935 Restriction of Ribbon Development Act and the 1938 Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act.

In the late 1940s, however, the Green Belt provisions of the 1938 Act and the 1944 Greater London Plan were increasingly used to discourage the London County Council (LCC) from building outside its boundaries ('out-county' building). Before the decade was out, other authorities were also faced with advisory plans advocating Green Belt designation of building land. In Scotland, Glasgow Corporation was severely affected. In England and Wales, continuing pressure from well-established bodies such as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England led the new Minister, Duncan Sandys, to issue in 1955, out of the blue, a circular asking cities to designate Green Belts. Slightly earlier, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) - the Government Department responsible for housing and planning in England and Wales - was beginning to respond to political pressure from the farming lobby, by urging authorities to economise in the use of land. Ironically, however, this defensiveness over land 'waste' resulted mainly from the determination of the then Minister, Harold Macmillan, to secure an expanded housebuilding programme by 'going to do battle with the Minister of Agriculture for housing land'.


'Planners, the force of whose movement comes from the popular desire to escape from Town Cramming'. F. J. Osborn

These piecemeal Government land-restriction policies would not, in themselves, have been unduly serious in their effects, had they not been linked to a doctrine which was committed to the curtailment of municipal autonomy in the housing field: the town planning movement, newly elevated to Government-endorsed Establishment status during and after World War II. This chapter will evaluate the local-political implications of planning - the way in which the national town-planning establishment set up a 'land trap' for the cities, which they would only escape through the massed building of Modern flats.

The planning attack on the cities derived from a longstanding British architectural theory of working-class housing, which had been formulated by a line of 19th and early 20th century English writers and architects from Ruskin through to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Here, one visual and moral ideal always seemed prominent: that of the individual cottage, whose ruralising wholeness would, it was claimed, restore 'dignity' to the life of the working classes. At the turn of the century, this theory had been extended to a city-wide scale, advocating the relief of the chaotic and fragmented industrial city by the establishment of 'rational' garden-cities or cottage-settlements; and it became the focus of the new discipline of town planning. The work of Raymond Unwin established the Jekyll-and-Hyde character of town planners. His public activity was dominated by the sober professionalism of the Ministry official and committee man, planting garden suburbs throughout Britain and establishing cottages as the mainstay of the new State housing programme. Behind this orderly facade, however, Morrisian socialist evangelism continued to blaze. The town planning discipline was from the beginning shot through with utopianism and enthusiasm for sweeping prescriptions of reconstruction.
It was above all the campaigning of F.J. Osborn, Secretary of the Town and Country Planning Association, which synthesised these tendencies into a single, potent doctrine. Osborn was the first to combine the common-man pretensions and latent English xenophobia of the cottage-movement (a 'Chestertonian belief that common prejudices are almost invariably sound') with a refocusing of Ebenezer Howard’s decentralist theories around central State intervention. Osborn attacked the 'irrationality' of the modern city, with its congested inner slums and its sprawling, speculative-built suburbs. He contended that the Government should impose a national replanning programme of new towns, in order to secure the rational restructuring of both housing and industry.

Implicit in this thinking were coercive assumptions: that existing municipalities were archaic irrelevancies which should be disregarded or circumvented, or that the assumed preference for cottages over flats in England could be used to justify the displacement of large urban populations. The TCPA was dismissed by many contemporary commentators as a fringe group, as 'monomaniacs' who 'gave the impression they had more clout than they really did'. And Osborn's trenchant doctrines of State-imposed decentralism were watered down in the official manifestoes of reconstruction during and immediately after World War II: the Barlow Commission Report on mass population dispersal; the various city or regional plans masterminded by Sir Patrick Abercrombie, which recommended the application of this principle to particular cities; and the 1946 New Towns Act, which tried to shift the focus of urban development away from the old industrial conurbations to new and self-contained towns-planted and governed by administrative order.

At this point, it is salutary to remember that town planning, far from some kind of monolithic bloc, was as diverse as any profession, and none of its principal players, such as Howard, Unwin, even Osborn, advocated the complete supercession, rather than the relief, of the industrial city. But the particular concern of this chapter is the issue of planning attitudes towards municipally-based housing provision or resistance to massed population dispersal. Here there was a measure of
A clear link is traceable between Osborn’s longstanding advocacy of the use of central administrative power to enforce planned overspill, and the policies of the new postwar planning establishment, with its non-elected, quasi-colonial New Town Corporations, and its low regard for municipal institutions and most politicians (a view which it shared with other central, professional-dominated institutions, such as the CHAC and SHAC). In the opinion of prominent LCC planner Percy Johnson-Marshall, for instance, ‘no Government or city realised the scale of the urban housing problem... Abercrombie had begun to tackle it, but it far transcended the ability of any councillor’. 
PLANNERS AGAINST 'HOUSERS' IN SCOTLAND

The confrontation between the national, professional 'planning machine' and municipal housing provision was especially acrimonious in Scotland. This resulted from the sharp conflict between the Scottish tenement tradition and the planners' aim of 'rational' population dispersal. The older residential areas of Scottish cities and large burghs were in any case densely packed, even in comparison with their counterparts in England and Wales. And even after 1919, a high proportion of the new municipal housebuilding had perpetuated the tenement pattern: in rural areas, the powerful county councils built many two-storey 'four-in-a-block' flats, often in areas where no flats existed. In postwar Scotland, housing reformism, with its longstanding attacks against the tenement flat, was closely bound up with town planning, with its dislike of autonomous local-authority housebuilding. These two associated movements, both imported from south of the border, were powerfully backed after 1945 by central Government in Scotland.

During the mid-1930s, the Scottish housing debate had increasingly focused on the problems of Glasgow, with its slums and overcrowding. Since World War I, the Corporation had built many cottages and two-storey flats as well as tenements. In the 'thirties, Patrick Dollan's new Labour administration, styling itself on the municipal authoritarianism of Mayor La Guardia and the housing strategy of the TCPA, planned an ambitious campaign of boundary extension and cottage-estate building. This programme was initiated in 1933-5 by Labour's first Convener of Housing, Mrs Jean Mann, a passionate Garden City enthusiast. The City's plans for self-contained reconstruction culminated, however, in a more grandiose plan by the City Engineer, Robert Bruce (1945-6), for the almost complete rebuilding of Glasgow: Bruce proposed to house over half the population in cottages on the recently-acquired land extensions, but also to employ 'modern tenements' in inner areas.

But, just as Glasgow was beginning to lay confident plans for self-contained postwar reconstruction, the City suddenly found itself, to its
surprise, caught in the jaws of a powerful 'land trap'. For the Government had endorsed a far-reaching proposal for reconstruction of the greater Glasgow region, drawn up by Abercrombie and local associates: the Clyde Valley Regional Plan. This sought to cut Glasgow down to size by a Green Belt which would sterilise much of the City's housing land. Only half of the 500,000 slum-dwellers to be displaced by slum clearance (under Bruce's plan) could now be accommodated in new dwellings inside the city boundary; the remainder would have to be overspilled to several New Towns. In 1946-7, armed with Abercrombie's interim plan, the Department of Health for Scotland (DHS: the Scottish Government department responsible until 1962 for housing and planning) compelled Glasgow to abandon much of a large peripheral development at Castlemilk, at which building work was about to start; DHS then added insult to injury by designating Scotland's first New Town at East Kilbride, only two miles south-east of Castlemilk. * (Ill. 5)

The proposals of Abercrombie's team were couched in the technical vocabulary of land-use planning; and Abercrombie of course shared with Bruce, and Glasgow's councillors, an urgent wish to destroy the city's closely-packed slums. But the Plan also had a hidden anti-municipal agenda. Its provisions, if fully implemented, would destroy the power of Glasgow's Housing Committee, by abstracting away its building land, and forcing it to export half of the population to be displaced by its slum-clearance programme.

The forceful way in which Abercrombie's plan was imposed on Glasgow, despite the Corporation's great power, reflected a convergence of views between Ministers and some civil servants favourably disposed to decentralism. This political-administrative consensus seemed to support the sweeping expectations of the town planning profession in the 1940s. But, as will be shown in the next chapter, the most enduring consensus within Scottish housing policymaking was of a different and, in this context, opposite character. This was an alliance which united large Labour local authorities and production-orientated Scottish Office Administrators, both concerned to sustain large-scale building and low rents.
The Clyde Valley Regional Plan 1946: section of Master Plan (redrawn 1989 by M. Oglethorpe), showing Green Belt overlapping Glasgow's city boundary and building land. At bottom right is East Kilbride New Town.
It will be seen that postwar public housing in Scotland became a field of incessant conflict over the 'Glasgow problem' between these two alliances. At first, under the late-1940s Labour Government, during the initial postwar period of messianic planning aspirations, the decentralists held sway: their furthest point of advance was the imposition and early reinforcement of Abercrombie's 'land trap' for Glasgow. But later, in the 1950s and early 1960s, the resurgence of public housing construction, coupled with the political weakness of Scottish Ministers, would allow Glasgow and the large burghs to formulate a daring counter-plan, which would block key elements of the Clyde Valley Plan's grand strategy.
FROM NEW TOWNS TO EXPANDED TOWNS

During the early 1950s, therefore, an external threat to British cities' housing land supply was becoming clear. This resulted both from the Government's partial endorsement of planned population dispersal, and from its search, from 1951, for economy in public housing's use of land, in the course of the 'People's House' campaign for higher output. In 1952, however, the progress of planned decentralism seemed to slow, following the Conservative Government's decision to distance itself from the very costly New Towns policy. In England and Wales, the Government announced in that year that no more would be started. In Scotland, the New Town programme was protected by the tenacity of the Secretary of State, James Stuart, and by the resistance of Administrators and planners committed to the Abercrombie framework, such as James McGuinness and Robert Grieve. Stuart secured authorisation of one further 'New Town, Cumbernauld, in 1954 by persuading the Chancellor that his political position in relation to Glasgow Corporation would otherwise become 'quite untenable'. DHS was discouraged from designating a third Glasgow New Town, at Houston, in 1956 by local landed pressure: the Scottish New Towns policy thereafter lapsed for several years."

But civil servants succeeded in preserving some continuity with the previous policy, especially in England and Wales: MHLG's Secretary from 1954, Dame Evelyn Sharp, had formed part of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning contingent inherited at the merger with the Ministry of Health of 1951. (Ill. 6) To compensate for the decay of the New Towns programme, the so-called Town Development policy, set up in England and Wales on a piecemeal basis around 1950, was strengthened by the 1952 Town Development Act. Now population overspill from the 'sending authorities' (the old, supposedly overcrowded conurbations) would be channelled not into New Towns but into the expansion of existing towns ('reception authorities'). New housing in the expanded towns could be built by the reception authorities or, under a building agreement, by the sending authorities.
Dame Evelyn Sharp seen opening the Broadhall Community Centre, Stevenage New Town, in 1956: Jane McKay (aged 5) presents Dame Evelyn with a bouquet of red roses.
Although seen by some as second-best to New Towns, the expanded-town programme was supported by the TCPA, and influenced other housing policy initiatives during the 1950s. MHLG's housing subsidy increases of 1955 were explicitly viewed by Sharp as complementing a Green Belt circular of that year, and both measures were partly inspired by TCPA pressure, although Sharp herself was unimpressed by Osborn's ceaseless lobbying: 'He aggravates me!' 10

In Scotland, Town Development provisions were applied to the problems of Glasgow by the 1957 Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act. This provided still higher overspill grants than MHLG's equivalent subsidies, and also extended the prospect of further building in reception areas, at Exchequer expense, by the Scottish Special Housing Association. However, the SSHA, a nationwide building organisation under close DHS and Treasury supervision, intended to supplement municipal output in areas of particular demand, was always disliked by Labour-controlled councils. They saw it as a Government Trojan horse, intended to diminish their powers of employment and house-letting patronage. 11

Sustained by these provisions, and indirectly linked to the revival of nationwide slum-clearance in 1954, official overspill plans remained at a high level. Proposals ranged from only 5% of existing population for Greater London and 9% for Bristol, to 14% for Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle, 18% for Glasgow, Birmingham and Liverpool and an extraordinary 23% for Manchester and Salford! 12
As it happened, however, the expanded towns programme pleased almost nobody: it only succeeded in focusing more sharply the municipal opposition to overspill. The views of working-class slum-dwellers were never systematically canvassed on this issue: this allowed Osborn to portray overspill as an emancipatory crusade. But many councillors in sending authorities believed that there was much public disquiet concerning the policy, particularly among semi-skilled or unskilled city-dwellers. While some architects and sociologists laid great stress on the ideal of local 'community' during this period, many councillors in inner-urban slum areas such as Stepney or Bootle also perceived a strong local attachment among the inhabitants. This, although partly bound up with the effect of rent control in discouraging working-class residential mobility, was also undoubtedly bound up with the intense parochialism of residents and councillors. Many of the concerns voiced by representatives of slum-clearance areas were more mundane: out-county estates raised the spectres of long journeys and high transport fares, while new or expanded towns only attracted the skilled and upwardly mobile. One of the largest-scale single overspill movements carried out, the LCC's decanting of almost 1,000 households in 1959 from Warwick Crescent (Paddington) to Slough and elsewhere, caused such local resentment, with 'all the old dears saying "I'll be carried out feet first!" - going so far from where they'd been brought up!', that even Labour members of Paddington MBC privately began to question the LCC's official support for decentralism. (III. 7) It must also be pointed out that many of the same social grumbles were identified in the case of the most remote of the peripheral estates commenced by cities within their boundaries in the late 1940s and early '50s. In Glasgow, outer-suburban tenemental schemes became associated with such discontent by the end of the '50s, but the same applied to many English low-density estates. In 1958, for instance, an ITV television documentary painted in sensational terms the alleged unhappiness of tenants in Nottingham CBC's Clifton estate, a vast swathe of cottages (and some low flats) planted at the southernmost extremity of the city: 'A concrete wilderness, a soulless, heartless dormitory... devoid of social life - a
graveyard with lights.' Overspill outside boundaries merely took this kind of controversy a stage further. 13

Whatever the presumed state of public opinion, councillors in British cities had one central reason to oppose dispersal: the effect on municipal finances of any cut in the local tax-base (rateable value) and (in some cases) in the Central Government supplement provided by Exchequer Equalisation Grant. This applied whether the overspill dwellings were to be built by the reception authority, by the sending authority (or, for that matter, by the SSHA). The problem was stated most frankly by Conservative councillors, such as Shennan of Liverpool: 'One of the great problems in replanning is the realisation that the city's corporate wealth is in its rateable value, and this, in turn, rests upon the earning and spending power of its citizens. It is therefore essential that... as many as possible of our citizens and our business enterprises shall be retained within the city's boundaries'. 14

In Scotland, the only sending authority designated under the 1957 Act was Glasgow Corporation itself. Here there was a general feeling that overspill constituted a direct attack on the City's high output and low-rents policies: there was a far higher average contribution from rate fund to housing revenue account than applied in equivalent English authorities. Many councillors saw it as 'adding insult to injury to have to help a family to be exported from the City, and then to have to pay for it!' Indeed, at a broader level, they viewed overspill as a slight on the entire City: 'They felt they were being denigrated!' 15

Across urban Britain, overspill seemed to threaten municipal housebuilding, simply by siphoning away people for which houses would otherwise have had to be built within existing boundaries. The towns facing the highest proportion of overspill were those with active housebuilding councils, whose powerful and entrenched Housing Committees would not lightly tolerate the dismantling of their building 'empires'.

In this area, municipal opposition to dispersal was caused less by any quantifiably harmful effect, whether on land supply or municipal
finance, than by its psychological impact. As it carried on through the
1950s, it became a focus for broad disquiet about the new but ill-
defined central challenge to local housing powers. Overspill proposals
were not often directly linked with restrictions on municipal building
land: the most notable case was that of a 1957 redevelopment plan for
Glasgow, to be discussed below. To authorities determined to build on a
large scale, however, overspill seemed to form part of a climate ever
more inimical to their policy autonomy.

The unpopularity of expanded-town overspill contributed to, and was
reinforced by, its administrative ineffectiveness: nobody had any real
interest in seeing that it worked properly. The only major exceptions
to the hostility of sending authorities were the LCC, as a regional
council involved in coordination of borough overspill, and Manchester,
whose peculiar zeal in pursuing low-density overspill policies will be
discussed later. The LCC discovered its isolation when it summoned a
conference of major cities in 1956 to discuss the financing and
administration of dispersal. The opposition of the provincial delegates
was evident in the blunt comment of Liverpool's Labour leader, Alderman
Jack Braddock: 'If it is intended to press Liverpool to rehouse its
housing applicants miles from the City, we shall be prepared to resist
it'.

In England, the administration of town development overspill generally
devolved to county councils or joint committees dominated by the
counties (and much influenced by farming interests), and it thus became
a football in the feuding between counties and county boroughs. To the
latter, overspill seemed a particularly threatening extension of
previous county opposition to boundary extensions. For example, in
1953, following Northumberland County Council's success in halting
further land purchases by Newcastle on its territory, the City's Housing
Committee Chairman called for more intensive development of remaining
land holdings outside the City, asserting that 'except for one or two
odd sites we have no more land left, and we shall be obliged to rely on
what we can obtain from the County'.
Even when overspill agreements were concluded, they were often seriously hampered by continual inter-authority hostility at member and officer level. The West Midlands was the most discord-ridden provincial conurbation. There, the county boroughs such as Walsall and Wolverhampton had to balance their conflicts with the counties over housing land with the need to keep a watch on the doings of 'Big Brother' Birmingham, while the City itself followed its own boundary-extension battles; the urban districts and small boroughs formed a seething and squabbling backdrop. (Map 2) In 1950-1, for instance, Staffordshire County Council, wishing to block a proposed boundary extension by Wolverhampton CBC, set up an overspill agreement with Wednesfield UDC and Seisdon RDC, under which Wolverhampton was initially promised a total allocation of 10,550 houses; this was revised in 1957 to 6,596. But after several years' intermittent overspill and incessant disagreement over output and reletting arrangements, the agreement petered out in 1963 after only 3,979 dwellings had been erected. As a result, Wolverhampton registered its 'profound disappointment at the collapse of the overspill promises made to the Corporation in 1950'. Many receiving authorities throughout England and Wales were at first enthusiastic ('smallish towns anxious to join, because they were in a desperate economic situation... lots of goodwill, but not much ability!'), their euphoria was before long shattered by a rise in Public Works Loan Board interest rates, which reached 5½% by 1956; Ashford UDC, for instance, was only prevented from revoking its overspill agreement with the LCC by Board of Trade threats that industrial development certificates would be withheld.

Local lack of enthusiasm for overspill was echoed by Government uncertainty. To Dame Evelyn Sharp, decentralism remained an enduring ideal, but one best pursued through the building of New Towns, a direct Ministry creation whose achievements she felt were ever worthy of research and reflection; by comparison, town development she found a dull and fragmented process. Her subordinates, by contrast, were dismayed by its administrative complication, and felt that 'it was extremely difficult to make it work, because the administrative machinery was inadequate - it lacked the simplicity of a New Town'. And
Ministers, by the mid-1950s, were becoming increasingly aware of the extent of local opposition to the entire process. But the most decisive opposition to overspill came not from the receiving authorities, nor from civil servants, but from the large sending authorities, in Britain's major conurbations. During the 1950s, they felt ever more threatened by a Government-approved decentralist policy, which seemed the more unacceptable for its contradictions. Development Plans and housing land supply were constrained by assumptions of up to 23% population loss: but the concomitant overspill arrangements were clearly inadequate. Underlying many towns' worries was a corrosive fear that their land might dry up in the medium term—a worry made worse by the displacement of inhabitants which resulted from the new Government emphasis on slum-clearance (which will be discussed in the next chapter). The problem seemed qualitative as much as quantitative: a change in the nature of land supply, a change from simple large developments on open peripheral land to complicated, scattered gap sites or small instalments of redevelopment areas.

To Housing Committees across the country, it now seemed a matter of the utmost urgency to find a way out of this 'land trap'. Their anxiety resulted less from popular opposition to overspill or desire to keep existing 'communities', than from an anxiety to preserve the autonomy of municipal housing policy, and to defend civic status. In retrospect, this siege-mentality seems sometimes to have verged on the irrational. But what was here at stake was not so much a matter of hard figures as of collective or institutional attitudes. For an increasing number of municipalities throughout Britain, it now seemed that a new way of maintaining output on small or piecemeal sites would have to be found as swiftly as possible.
It was now that municipalities were presented with a weapon tailor-made for defensive building: the multi-storey block (of 6 or more storeys). As was briefly remarked at the beginning of this chapter, high blocks were introduced to Britain after World War II as a prominent component of Modern architectural patterns of housing: such blocks could include either flats, or maisonettes (vertically stacked two-storey dwellings). Modern architects had rejected existing flatted types such as 'block dwellings' on grounds of their street-block layout and their allegedly lumpish appearance. Pursuing new ideals of light and open air, they had advocated use of higher, freestanding buildings, often in coordinated mixed developments. The LCC architects' rejection of Walker's densely-packed block dwellings in the controversy of 1949-50, and their initial use of higher, slender 'point' blocks in open, landscaped settings, epitomised this contrast. But the urge of forceful urban authorities up and down the country to build large numbers of dwellings within their boundaries was not diminished by the LCC designers' success. Instead, this desire remained as strong as ever, and was to find a new expression under the pressure of the 'land trap'. Increasingly, those pursuing higher production were to seize on the designers' high blocks, and to use them as an output weapon, simply because of their greater height.

The designers had set out and reinforced their definition of 'appropriate' high building, both at the architectural and planning levels. The architects did so by promoting mixed development, in which multi-storey blocks were only one element alongside others, such as two-storey houses and four-storey maisonettes. Some town planners tried to constrain the use of high blocks through their own interpretations of that very flexible codification of the relationship between land and dwelling numbers: 'density'. The basis of those planners' line of attack was the so-called 'diminishing returns' theory, initially formulated by Unwin and Osborn. This held that building of higher blocks was an irrational attempt to 'get a quart into a pint pot', which in reality resulted in very few more dwellings than low blocks, because the open space required by further dwellings soon outstripped the open
space released by increased height. Planners in the LCC and elsewhere bolstered this 'diminishing returns' doctrine through elaborate theoretical assumptions. They claimed that fixed areas of open space for ancillary uses, proportional to the number of dwellings, ought to be provided in every new housing scheme; and, confident in their own power, they took it as read that local authorities would, in all cases, obey these guidelines. Such supposedly obligatory space provisions included school playing fields, public open space, estate roads and (in the 1960s) car parking.

In the 1940s, closely-spaced five-storey LCC tenements had shown themselves easily able to attain 200 persons per acre (p.p.a.), the maximum zoned density in Inner London. Over the 1950s, Glasgow Corporation's peripheral schemes of three and four storey tenements consistently yielded 100-110 p.p.a., and, in the middle of that decade, even MHLG architects well-disposed to Modern design admitted that densities of 100 p.p.a. were obtainable without exceeding four storeys. (ILL. 15) Yet this general range of zoned densities – between 100 and 200 – was also to form the context in which most high blocks, often of twenty storeys or more, were to be built, between the late 1950s and the late 1960s.

The idea of 'density' was complex and very ambiguous. To Modern designers, it seemed to offer a way of extending and reinforcing their influence. It helped them to disseminate the pattern of housing that they favoured for urban use – mixed development; and it could then be used as a weapon to prevent others from appropriating multi-storey blocks and turning them into another type of 'site cramming'.

The production lobby, however, saw the tenement/multi-storey antithesis in diametrically opposite terms. To them, the difference between the two forms was simply one of height and easy dwelling gain – considerations which seemed increasingly important, as land supply became more and more problematic. The slender 'point' block seemed so much better at plugging small gap sites than were horizontally-disposed tenements. Organisationally, too, multi-storey blocks, once settled in
any town's housing programme, appeared much the simplest way to realise large batches of dwellings quickly from scattered sites. Influential designers sensed the danger this posed to their own role, and insisted that the initial rehousing without displacement should be counterbalanced by subsequent demolitions to create public open space. In the opinion of the LCC's Oliver Cox, for instance, piecemeal redevelopment with isolated point-blocks 'was madness. If it had to be developed piecemeal, you did an overall plan!' 

But to the Housing Committee and officers of an active, production-orientated municipality, the density regulations, 'diminishing returns' argumentation and meticulous mixed development patterns of the designers could only seem artificial and irrelevant. Cities and large towns across the country, one after the other, began to come to the conclusion that multi-storey blocks offered the easiest and quickest way to exploit the small gap sites with which increasingly found themselves confronted. Having made the basic decision to build high, they then found no difficulty, by a thousand and one minor changes in site definition - inclusion of adjacent open space, adjustments to notional phasing of redevelopment, and so forth - in ensuring that any individual site would conform to zonings and any other applicable planning 'rules'. 
MODERN FLATS IN THE PROVINCES: A PRODUCTION COUNTER-REVOLUTION?

The LCC's exemption from local housing pressures and Ministry loan-sanction vetting permitted the Council's powerful architects to use high blocks not as a means for higher output, but as one element in that elaborate social and visual formula, mixed development. This was supported by an intricate official science of Density, which stipulated precise combinations of block types at various given densities. But in authorities dedicated to large-scale housing production, councillors and officers were less interested in high blocks' association with notional 'high density' or 'mixed development' than in their height itself. In the schemes of the LCC and those few Metropolitan Boroughs committed to the values of design, it was the new Modern blocks - point blocks, slab blocks, and maisonettes - which exerted a clear fascination on 'provincial' visitors, from Scotland or from Middlesex. This resulted both from their suitability for high output, and from their visual connotations of modernity and progress. A councillor from Halesowen, for example, exclaimed that Hackney MBC's 15-storey point-blocks at Paragon Road 'made his own authority, which thought it was progressive, look like a snail which had lost its way'. (Ills. 8, 9)

As the new Modern types percolated outwards from London, a powerful trend began to manifest itself. The simplicity of high blocks' quantitative potential, from the perspective of local housing needs, started to displace the socio-stylistic intricacies of the original mixed development idea. Some authorities with design-orientated City Architects, such as Womersley of Sheffield and Gibson (later Ling) of Coventry, tried to imitate the LCC emphasis on architect control. But an ever larger number of production-orientated cities and towns seized on multi-storey blocks as a means of reviving output and breaking out of the 'land trap'. 80% of all high flats approved in the UK between 1945 and 1952 had been in the County of London; but this proportion, in 1953-7, fell to 57%, and in 1958-62 to only 23%. Eventually, the most vigorous building of high flats, in the 1960s, would coincide almost exactly with a renewed public housing boom over the whole of the urban
In the mid 1960s, in many towns and cities, multi-storey flats came to be synonymous with high output.
The LCC's Tidey Street and Spanby Road developments, Poplar, including two 19-storey towers built from 1962 (the Council's highest to that date): 1989 view.
THE PRODUCTION-LINE STARTS: LIVERPOOL AND LEEDS

In cities whose councillors felt themselves to be under threat of mass overspill or land starvation, the qualifications associated with high blocks by the LCC architects were pared away, in favour of increasingly open pursuit of numbers. Ruthlessly, the LCC mixed development pattern was discarded, along with its insistence on individual architect design for each site, and its combination of high and low flats, maisonettes and cottages in response to the zoned density laid down by the planners. Now multi-storey blocks often became the only component - a point block on a suburban gap-site or a small redevelopment site, with low blocks sometimes tacked on or added later, and site definition and notional density adjusted to suit the high blocks desired, rather than vice versa. The ideal of tailor-made design for individual sites was replaced by that of the standard 'package deal' block; and, under urgent local pressures, the sociological complexity of 'need-fit' planning was ditched in favour of letting on a first come-first served basis. The first major steps in this direction were taken by two cities with an established 'flat tradition': Liverpool and Leeds.

Liverpool CBC was the first large provincial authority whose employment of high blocks became directed by almost undiluted emphasis on production. Liverpool's religious-political local electoral balance was maintained by covert agreement between Labour and Conservatives. So there was an underlying consistency in housebuilding policy during the 1940s and 1950s, and the city was long seen by Ministry Housing Administrators as a model of uncomplicated high output. Liverpool's cosmopolitanism and lack of closely associated rural hinterland, and the dependence of so many of its working-class citizens on the docks, prevented the growth of a local-political passion for cottage development to the extent characteristic of many other English towns. Between the wars, Liverpool Corporation had moved rapidly to start development of slum-clearance flats in the centre; during World War II, this policy was reinforced by the City Architect, Lancelot Keay.
After 1945, Liverpool's flat-building was initially still confined to block dwellings, although two experimental high blocks were started in 1954 by Keay's assertive and dynamic successor, Ronald Bradbury. The City's sense of an impending land crisis finally erupted into the open in 1955, after Labour's capture of the Council. The Corporation had been prepared to overspill population to sites immediately outside the city boundary, and had indeed suggested that the largest of these sites, at Kirkby, should be designated as a New Town. But the Ministry refused this proposal, and then forced the Corporation into frustrating negotiations on expanded-town overspill. As a result of these delays, over the mid and late 1950s many working-class Liverpool councillors violently turned against any proposal for overspill. This feeling was eagerly exploited by the Labour Group and Council Leader, Alderman Jack Braddock, whose coarse and belligerent manner concealed an instinctive sympathy with the beliefs and sectarian fears of slum-dwellers in inner local wards such as St. Anne's (a mainly Roman Catholic area represented in the Corporation by his wife Bessie), or St. Domingo and Netherfield (held by the tiny Protestant Party under an electoral pact with the Conservatives). 27

Braddock and his wife, former Communists who had smartly moved far to the right, exerted an 'iron grip' on Liverpool's Labour political machine, through a 'ruthless apparatus' of religious-political control and patronage. In 1955, incensed by the Ministry's blocking tactics on the land question, and by its refusal of overspill subsidy for Kirkby, Braddock unleashed Bradbury, and his Housing Chairman, Alderman David Nickson. Now vigorous multi-storey building commenced, on any available land: point blocks and slab blocks, suburban sites and slum-clearance sites. At first, some blocks were erected in slum-clearance areas such as Everton, with the hope of redeveloping them without breaking up existing religious-political groupings. By contrast, suburban point-blocks, such as those at Beechwood Road or alongside Sefton Park, were let to skilled working-class tenants. (ILL. 10) But this elaborate social differentiation rapidly fell away during the early 1960s. The Braddocks held that there was some distrust of multi-storey flats among families with children, even in Liverpool. But the 'land trap' seemed a
Croxteth Drive development, Liverpool: a line of 15-storey blocks built by Townson from 1963 along the north edge of Sefton Park. The first multi-storey development adjoining the park was Aigburth Drive (Belem Tower), built from 1958.
far more immediate danger on all fronts: social, economic and political. So in 1957 Bradbury was directed to step up the City's counterattack against overspill. Defying the supposed 'diminishing returns' of increased height, he began gaily adding more storeys to blocks already authorised (for instance, raising the Garibaldi Street scheme from 10 to 14 storeys); and he drove a coach and horses through any idea of blanket zoned densities, by preparing plans for a 22-storey block at Harding Street, at a density of 229 p.p.a.

Leeds, in contrast to Liverpool, was under longstanding Labour control. The Housing Committee, under the leadership of Rev. C. Jenkinson, had in 1935 diversified away from cottage-building, by embarking on one of Britain's first large-scale multi-storey redevelopment schemes, at Quarry Hill. The Leeds slum-clearance and multi-storey drive resumed after the war in 1955 with the (recommenced) Saxton Gardens development. Leeds's schemes were accepted by councillors as a 'success' and were seen as popular among tenants. But by 1956, with exhaustion of central and peripheral sites looming, it was clear that a new policy would be needed to rescue the City's housing programme from collapse. The political initiative was taken by a new and energetic Housing Committee Chairman, Councillor Karl Cohen, who demanded that high blocks should be built on remaining gap sites, to maximise their yield. The means to carry out this plan was furnished by the City Architect, R.A.H. Livett, who drew up point block plans suitable for erection in either traditional or prefabricated construction. In 1956, the first contract, for twelve 10-storey blocks in precast concrete construction on five suburban sites, was awarded to Reema (a national firm, based in Salisbury, specialising in concrete prefabrication), while negotiations for ten more blocks in brick-clad in-situ construction were started with a Lancashire firm, Townson. In a later chapter, it will be seen that this pattern of semi-competitive negotiated point-block contracts would provide the backbone of Cohen's programme over the ensuing decade, in which he was able to conquer the worst of Leeds's housing problem.  

(Ills. 11, 42)
Lincoln Green redevelopment, Leeds, seen in 1989, showing standard 10-storey point blocks built by Shepherd and Wimpey in 1958-60.
Leeds's repetitive point blocks were viewed by the LCC's architects and 'progressive' councillors as a clear example of provincial 'debasement' of the Modern patterns which they had pioneered. The Council's longstanding Housing Committee Vice-Chairman, Mrs. Evelyn Denington, recalls that 'we went up to Leeds and were horrified at what they were doing, building tall blocks everywhere, on hills, where they weren't justified!' LCC architects were shocked yet fascinated by the raw power, and the (from the LCC viewpoint) contempt for design evinced by members and officers in some Northern cities. In the view of one architect who moved from the LCC to work in Leeds, the councillor 'housing leaders' of the Northern cities were 'just blustering, coarse heavy men who were extremely ambitious - 60% proof personal ambition, to get knighthoods or hold the Mayor's mace!' The dominant officers, in his opinion, were the 'professional engineers, used to top-down command Socialism - gross men marching paternalistically over the landscape!'

Following the path-breaking example of authorities such as Liverpool and Leeds, many lesser cities - and by no means all under Labour control - seized on high flats, from the late 'fifties, as a tailor-made way to get them out of the 'land trap'.

In 1957, for example, Portsmouth CBC, the most congested second-rank English county borough, in terms of gross density, found itself facing the exhaustion of its principal building site outside its boundaries, Leigh Park, as well as an increasing ward-level pressure to recommence slum-clearance on Portsea Island. In that year, also, MHLG refused the Conservative administration's grandiose boundary-extension plans, which it had been hoped would halt population loss, with its resulting cut in rate revenue and Exchequer Equalisation Grant. Although the building of tenement-type high flats had aroused opposition in 1953 from councillors and some potential tenants, four years later the increasing difficulty of letting Leigh Park, and the likelihood of having to enter into overspill agreements to export population, had come to seem a far more immediate threat.
After considerable debate, the Housing Committee's powerful and long-serving chairman, Councillor Frank Miles, secured the approval of Portsmouth's first 12-storey block at Nelson Street, in 1960. He contended that, although the scheme would cost £70 more per dwelling than Leigh Park cottages, it 'would provide more homes on Portsea Island, for a diminishing population would adversely affect the Government block grant to Portsmouth'. The City Architect, F. Mellor, also justified the scheme on the grounds that there was much popular opposition to overspill: 'Many people who are being rehoused have said that they want to stay in Portsmouth, and the Committee is attempting to fulfil these wishes'. Only 10 or 12 high blocks were envisaged at this stage, although 38 were subsequently built. But the defensive potential of high building against the threat of population dispersal was so clear that councillors immediately pleaded for even higher blocks and redevelopment densities, and urged that the Committee should 'keep people in the city. Many people do not want to move outside to places like Leigh Park. They say it is like being sent to Siberia'.

32
SHEPPARD FIDLER IN BIRMINGHAM: FROM ‘MUD PIES’ TO MIXED DEVELOPMENTS

The success of provincial imitations of the LCC approach to housing design, with its insistence on architect control, much depended on strong support from councillors resembling in outlook to those of the LCC. This 'design-first' approach was extremely vulnerable to pressure from production-orientated councillors and officers. This became clear in the difficulties experienced in Birmingham by A.G. Sheppard Fidler, after he moved from Crawley New Town in 1952 to take up his appointment as the Corporation's first City Architect.

Sheppard Fidler's new department, whose responsibilities included housing design and construction, had originated as an offshoot from the Public Works Department, run by the powerful City Engineer, Herbert Manzoni, who subsequently kept responsibility for town planning and all public works. Unlike Manzoni, Sheppard Fidler enjoyed the patronage of no one parent committee, and at times began to feel that his department had been created in a fit of absentmindedness: 'Birmingham were an engineering city and felt they didn't need a City Architect. It was funny to find I wasn't really wanted - I thought "What the hell am I doing here?". It was the Town Clerk and myself versus the rest - and then when the Town Clerk suddenly committed suicide, that wasn't much help!!'

The new City Architect inherited, from Manzoni, a programme of contractor-designed six- and eight-storey blocks for construction both on slum-clearance sites and in the suburbs. These had been commissioned by the city's Unionist administration after prototype 12-storey blocks in the Duddeston-Nechells RDA had proved extremely costly ('the lumpiest things you'd ever seen... everyone gets their own staircase there!). Sheppard Fidler recollects:

"When I went to Birmingham, you could have called it Wimpey Town or Wates Town. The Deputy City Engineer came into my office the very first day I arrived, shoved all these plans on my desk, and said, "Carry on with these!" He was letting contracts as fast as he could go, didn't know what he was doing, just putting up as many Wimpey Y shaped blocks as he could! This rather shattered me, because we'd had very careful schemes prepared at Crawley, with very great interest on the part of the
Development Corporation, whereas in Birmingham the House Building Committee could hardly care about the design as long as the numbers were kept up - I'd been used to gentle Southern people! There was very little architectural quality about these "mud pies", but I either had to let it run and hope to bring in changes - which is what I did - or go to the Council and say "Stop everything for two years while I change things!" Then I'd have been out, not them!"

So Sheppard Fidler continued, reluctantly, to build Manzoni's architecturally old-fashioned 'mud pies', while he readied new policies which he hoped might establish design in control of Birmingham's housing programme. (Ill. 12) The first policy was that his Department should produce its own designs for cottages, low flats and point blocks: these would form a basis for selected or negotiated contracts with national firms employing their own construction. It might thus be possible to divert contractual initiative into collaborative development work and constructional experiments: 'I'll design it, and you can Wimpify it!' His second new policy was to replace standard blocks with developments tailor-designed for each site, which would embody LCC mixed development principles rather than contain just 'mud pies' of homogeneous appearance and height. Sheppard Fidler asserted 'the impossibility of getting high densities... with standard type plans and without mixed development'. In confident LCC manner, he declared that 'overrepetition of layout groups must be guarded against and resisted if "design" is not to be relegated to be the least important factor in development'. His third innovation was to appoint a landscape architect, Miss Mary Mitchell: 'I had a hell of a time explaining to the Committee why I required such an unusual being... that what we wanted was a landscape designer and not a "Parks Department person"!' (Ill. 13)

However, the initial impact of Sheppard Fidler's dogged campaign to establish the equality of design with sheer output in Birmingham's housing also owed much to external circumstances - in particular, the willingness of Bradbeer's Labour administration to countenance a large-scale overspill proposal. By 1959, as will be seen in a later chapter, storm-clouds would appear on the horizon, with the collapse of hopes for a boundary extension, a turn in opinion within the Council against
Manzoni 'mud pies' in Birmingham: 6-storey and 3-storey Wimpey blocks built at the Bath Row (later Lee Bank) redevelopment area, Unit 301, from 1952.
Sheppard Fidler's 'architectural' housing ideal: general view of western section of Lee Bank, c. 1908. An example of the landscaped mixed developments favoured by the City Architect for slum clearance and suburban sites.
overspill, and the rise of Alderman Harry Watton, a new Labour Group leader impatient to reverse the decline in the City's housing drive.
Despite the seeming comprehensiveness of the Clyde Valley Plan's 'land trap', Glasgow was one of the last big cities to seize on multi-storey flats as its means of escape. During the early 1950s, the new City Architect, A.G. Jury, proved able to persuade DHS to release large chunks of Green Belt land. His department developed these sites with repetitive three and four storey tenements, making possible a building rate (per head of population) between 12% and 64% higher than Britain's other largest cities. Jury recalls: 'It always came back to the target... as many as could be constructed in the least possible time - throughout my entire service in Glasgow!' The City could thus defer the inevitable final confrontation over land, and did not need to turn to multi-storey blocks to prevent a slide in output. 36 (Ills. 1, 2, 14-16)

However high the short-term output achieved through tenement-building, there was no long term strategy with which the planners' central-local alliance could be opposed. The latter continued to make the running in policy terms, and tried to tighten the jaws of the 'land trap' still further. It will be seen in the next chapter that Ministers' political vulnerability in relation to Glasgow limited DHS's scope for action. So the pace was now set not by the Department's Planning Division, which had a 'sharp perception of the impossibility of getting a Ministerial stand against Glasgow', but by Jury's own planning staff, under R.E. Nicoll. (Ill. 17) The planners doggedly set out, with the assistance of the TCPA, and the encouragement of the City's brief Progressive (non-Socialist) administration around 1950, to make explicit the overspill implications of the 1951 Development Plan and a 1952 report on Glasgow's housing needs. 37

Nicol's team argued that, out of 100,000 dwellings to be cleared, 60,000 would require to be overspilled outside the city. This figure was, however, dependent on the establishment and enforcement of density and other controls in the redevelopment areas. To make this possible, they devised a watered down variant of the LCC mixed development,
15 1950s peripheral tenement schemes in Glasgow: Drumchapel, seen from west, 1989.
Moss Heights, Glasgow (built from 1950): 1953 view of newly-completed Block C. One of only two prototype multi-storey schemes built in the City before the late '50s.
R. E. Nicoll
THE TIRELESS PLANNER

without cottages, and employed 'diminishing returns' argumentation as a justification for imposing a density ceiling of 165 p.p.a. in those areas. They argued that the redevelopment areas must contain no more than 50% high flats; schemes for the first area to be tackled, Hutchesontown-Gorbals, were commissioned from Sir Robert Matthew and Sir Basil Spence. The latter's design took the form of extraordinary 20-storey Brutalist slabs with inset communal balconies. These, Spence told the Housing Committee, would revive the working-class life of the tenement back-green: 'He told them, "On Tuesdays, when all the washing's out, it'll be like a great ship in full sail!" - that was a patter-merchant if ever there was one!' But although these two 'grand gestures' were to some extent useful as a contribution to the breaking down of conservatism within the Corporation against high blocks (evident, for instance, in the predictions of the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Horne, that 'back to back' planning and internal bathrooms would cause disease), their usefulness, in terms of output, was vitiated by their slowness and by cost overruns. 33 (Ills. 18-26)

Meanwhile, however, the Housing Committee found itself faced with a far more immediate threat. In 1957, Nicoll's planners, working closely with the staff of Robert Grieve (Regional Planning Officer in DHS Planning Division) had won Corporation approval for a daring housing plan: the Report on the Clearance of Slum Houses, Redevelopment and Overspill. Nicoll's report explicitly set out, with few exceptions, to put an end to new building in Glasgow other than in the redevelopment areas. These latter districts would now mostly be designated Comprehensive Development Areas (CDAs), implying close planning control. As these areas would not be significantly cleared before 1963, new housing construction in Glasgow during the six years in between would be virtually entirely diverted into overspill. 33

The Corporation and Labour Group leadership, under Peter Meldrum, was now officially well-disposed to population dispersal; but among some councillors (from both the Labour and Progressive parties), there was 'a general uneasiness' about the increasingly open overspill threat, and, even, about the 'juggernaut-like' scale of proposed redevelopments.
Hutchesontown-Gorbals redevelopment area, model of 1953 proposals.
Hutchesontown-Gorbals, 1953 perspective of proposed point block, by James Rae (Housing Architects Section).
Hutchesontown-Gorbals, 1953 perspective by Rae of proposed slab block. These point and slab blocks, very similar to LCC patterns, were not in fact built.
Many members still retained a deep-seated desire to 'do it all in Glasgow, keep the rateable value, and keep yourself as the second city of the Empire!'. To such councillors, piecemeal development of gap-sites or areas condemned by the Medical Officer of Health, seemed much preferable to 'comprehensive' redevelopment schemes. This thinking even found tacit support at Ministerial level during the 1950s, from housing Ministers such as Commander Galbraith (Lord Strathclyde) or J. Nixon Browne. In 1955, for instance, Nixon Browne speculated about the possibility of piecemeal multi-storey development to increase the yield of Hutchesontown-Gorbals and reduce the decanting liability. This brief display of Ministerial independence was, however, soon suppressed by Planning Division, which deluged the hapless Nixon Browne with a vast quantity of LCC 'diminishing returns' argumentation. 40

A more publicly prominent source of anti-overspill agitation was the furious crusading and publicising activity of a remarkable architect, Sam Bunton. The world outlook of the charismatic and ceaselessly inventive Bunton could not have been more remote from the delicate Arts and Crafts introversion of the LCC tradition. Following a hectic wartime period organising the rebuilding of Clydebank, following bombing, Bunton began pouring out a torrent of grandiose schemes for mass prefabrication of housing and total reconstruction of Glasgow using multi-storey flats: these schemes all presupposed that overspill should be kept to a minimum. The wide dissemination of Bunton's ideas within central and local government was assisted by his assiduous cultivation of figures such as Tom Johnston (the wartime Secretary of State), Craig Mitchell (the DHS Under-Secretary in charge of public housing administration) and A. Macpherson-Rait (the Glasgow Progressives' Housing Convener). Bunton's manner was genial and at all times breathlessly enthusiastic, and was characterised by a 'curious idealism - when you went into his office in Clydebank it was as though you were going to see Mussolini - seated behind a big desk - the atmosphere was messianic! He'd say, "It's obvious that fate has marked me out for this! Doors just keep opening in front of me, without my needing to push!" The extravagant scale of all Bunton's schemes, his absolute lack of interest in small details, and his admiration for big business
21 Hutchesontown-Gorbals, aerial view in 1956 from south-east before start of clearance.
Hutchesontown-Gorbals, view from south-east (from same viewpoint as ill. 21) during redevelopment in 1965. The four Area 'B' blocks are seen completed at right, the two Area 'C' blocks at centre, and the SSHA's four Area 'D' blocks under construction at front left.
Hutchesontown-Gorbals Area 'B' development: model made and photographed in 1959 by job architect John L. Paterson. Paterson also devised the roof-mounted floodlighting on the high blocks - an idea, inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, which was used on many subsequent Scottish multi-storey schemes.
were all in some degree influenced by Glasgow's interwar infatuation with the cinema-borne imagery and drama of American urban culture. At any rate, Bunton had no time at all for the conventions of 'national' British architecture, dominated by English notions of ruralising Picturesqueness, individuality of detail and gentlemanly amateurism. "

But despite Bunton's expansive world-view, his proposals enjoyed no concerted political or administrative support: Glasgow's Housing Conveners were too reactive to seize back the initiative, while Jury and middle-ranking DHS Administrators sceptically regarded Bunton's schemes as the cause of 'endless complications' and demarcation disputes. Therefore, the central-local 'vertical coalition' between Corporation and DHS planners, and sympathetic Administrators, continued to appear invulnerable. "

In June 1958, for instance, Bunton made a proposal for redevelopment within Glasgow using massively squat blocks of pentagonal or polygonal plan: this scheme, he hoped, would counter the Glasgow planners' redevelopment and overspill report of the year before. Within DHS Planning Division, the alarm bells rang, and the Under-Secretary, T.H. Haddow, immediately set in train a collaborative effort with sympathetic elements inside Glasgow Corporation 'to puncture the Bunton thesis, which is liable to spoil the atmosphere for the whole overspill operation'. By November, Nicoll's planners had ready a counter-report, based on Diminishing Returns argumentation and statistics derived from the LCC Planning Division; this report was handed to Haddow by Peter Meldrum, Glasgow's Labour Group leader, who was becoming more and more impatient with what he regarded as the reactionary, anti-planning stance of the Housing Committee inside the Corporation. Haddow triumphantly minuted James McGuinness, Planning Assistant Secretary, 'Anti-Buntonia, I think!' - and McGuinness, in his turn, heartily congratulated Robert Grieve: 'Mr. Nicoll's staff seem to have made good use of their recent contacts with you!'. By February 1959, McGuinness felt able to state that Bunton's proposal was 'practically dead'. "
View of Hutchesontown-Gorbals Area 'B' scheme as built (1966).
Hutchesontown-Gorbals Area ‘C’, laying of foundation stone (1961). From left to right: Jean Roberts (Lord Provost), Bailie David Gibson (Housing Convener), Alice Cullen MP, Archibald Jury (City Architect), George Campbell (DLO Manager), Councillor George Robertson (Planning Convener), and the Queen.
26 Hutchesontown-Gorbals Area 'C' development, cladding panel seen during construction, c. 1963.
By 1959, it was now obvious that no effective answer to the planners' central-local alliance would emerge from Bunton's Niagara of half-formed proposals. His schemes had been useful in helping keep anti-dispersal ideas on the boil within the Corporation. But a decisive political initiative, coming from within the Housing Committee, would be necessary if the Committee was to stand any chance of devising and forcing through any effective counter-strategy against the crushing overspill programme put forward by the planners in their 1957 Report on the Clearance of Slum Houses, Redevelopment and Overspill. We will discuss in a later chapter how just such an initiative was pushed through in the early 1960s: this would involve the building of multi-storey flats on any available site within the city, with the aim of breaking out of the Abercrombie 'land trap' once and for all.
PERSISTENCE OF 'TRADITIONAL' PATTERNS

Despite the fact that, during the 1950s, several major British cities had begun to construct Modern flats in quite large numbers, it could hardly be said that this yet constituted a nationwide pattern. By 1955, for example, flats and maisonettes still only accounted for 29% of annual public housing completions in England and Wales, and in rural areas the corresponding proportion was much lower. Five years later, this proportion had climbed to 47%; the equivalent figure in Scotland was 53%. 44

A number of municipalities throughout England and Wales would, in all likelihood, have built high flats but for undermining, which habitually coincided with areas where there was urgent political demand for new housing. In such areas the pattern of housing development was substantially determined by the type and extent of mine-workings. This category of town was unprotected from the effects of diminishing land supply in the late 1950s. For instance Stoke-on-Trent CBC, whose building programme was in many areas restricted to semi-detached cottages, saw its output plummet between 1956 and 1959 from an annual total of 2,054 to a rate of just 187. 45

Other cities with housing drives of more or less 'traditional' character found themselves able to keep up a high output well into the 1960s. Foremost among these was Sunderland CBC, which, facing no overspill threat and no shortage of land, could maintain by far the highest building level of any county borough in England and Wales over the first two postwar decades: Sunderland did not commence its first multi-storey scheme until 1961. In some other English cities, there was tension not between site constraints and production values, but between local anti-flat conservatism and architectural desires to emulate the design-dominated policies of the LCC or Coventry. For instance, in Norwich, a new City Architect, David Percival (appointed 1955: previously Gibson’s deputy in Coventry), had considerable difficulty in persuading the Housing Committee to authorise even four-storey maisonettes or point blocks. 46
In only one first-rank British city, Manchester, was hostility towards flats elevated into official municipal policy. Here, E.D. Simon's interwar attacks against the supposedly intractable evil of the Inner 'slum belt' (Ill. 27) and his praise of suburban cottages, had prevented the Council from formulating any redevelopment policy, and had caused it in 1944 to forbid the building of flats more than three (later four) storeys in height, or 90 p.p.a. in net density. During the 1950s, under the influence of Lady Simon, Derek Senior of the Manchester Guardian, and the City Surveyor, Manchester Corporation enthusiastically entered into overspill building agreements with adjacent towns and urban districts, and relegated its Housing Committee to a Cinderella-like position, allowing it only an intermittent programme of low flats, maisonettes and narrow-frontage houses. By the end of that decade, the Medical Officer of Health had begun to clear enormous swathes of the 'slum belt' every year, and Manchester's proposal for a major land acquisition outside its boundaries, at Lymm, had been refused; despite the continuing overspill building programme, output had begun a sharp decline. Increasingly MHLG's Housing Administrators became impatient with the dilatoriness of the Corporation (especially by comparison with Liverpool's consistently high output), and started to press Manchester to change its policies.

However, Manchester's comparative lack of interest in 'production' was not counterbalanced by any initiatives in the field of 'design'. Birmingham's City Architect Sheppard Fidler, for example, found it 'a very backward place - they didn't do anything, just cleared sites - it was a desert! I've never seen anything like it!' The Simon tradition had left the Corporation without any obvious 'housing leader' among councillors who could revitalise output. Among the officers, the newly-appointed Director of Housing, J. Austen Bent, was a man of meticulous detail rather than grand strategy: he had no interest in hunting down sites across the city and pressing for the rapid construction of dwellings on them, but instead preferred to spend his time avidly scrutinising the constructional minutiae of this or that particular project: 'He'd rub his hands: "Aha! The cube test results have arrived! Now I'll sit down and have a good look at them!"' As a result, there
was, for the moment, no way out of Manchester’s output impasse. We will see in Chapter 7 that this serious problem was only to be resolved in the early 1960s, by a turn to vigorous multi-storey production.  

Although Manchester was the only large city in which the Council both welcomed overspill and opposed large-scale flat-building, any wholesale move to build flatted Modern housing across Britain was also faced with a more general, ingrained cultural presumption in favour of cottage-dwellings among councillors throughout England and Wales, and even (increasingly) Scotland. This was associated, but not identical with the idealisation of the cottage by many English architectural critics and reformers from Ruskin onwards. What concerns us here is not the architectural, but the local political aspect of opposition to flats. Even in the most highly urbanised parts of England, even in Inner London, liking of cottages and distrust of flats was widely felt by working-class councillors, who believed that this directly reflected their constituents’ aspirations and fears: 'there was great antipathy in West Ham against flats full stop... the idealistic view was 100% cottages'. However, it is not possible completely to separate out the two strands of architectural/town planning utopianism and politics: they were particularly closely interwoven in the early 20th century history of the Labour Party and the ILP. In the same way that Labour councillors in Glasgow vigorously promoted garden suburbs at the time of World War I, Albert Salter’s ILP plan for the reconstruction of Bermondsey in the 1920s envisaged both wholesale overspill and a cottage-only building policy: he hated flats on public-health and moral grounds, as alleged breeding-grounds of tuberculosis and as 'soul-destroying barparks'. However, as a total of only 54 cottages was ever built under Salter’s plan, his preference of overspill to flats was not tested in practice.  

However, the bond between ILP socialist zealotry and opposition to flats was by no means unbreakable: we will see in a later chapter that, in the 1960s, one of the last ILP diehards, David Gibson of Glasgow, channelled the same millenarian socialist fanaticism into the cause of the massed building of multi-storey flats.
Some town-planning critics, such as F. J. Osborn, attempted to argue that opposition to flats inevitably implied acceptance of the principle of wholesale population dispersal; but many councillors were, in fact, suspicious of both flats and overspill. As experience of flat-building gradually percolated throughout England and Wales in the 'fifties, it became evident that anti-flat sentiment among local politicians was only severe or persistent in particular contexts where flats and unpopular remote locations coincided: for instance, in cases where large numbers of flats in overspill schemes or far-flung outer-suburban estates within authorities' boundaries were completed and let at any one time. Resistance was more pronounced when blocks were to be let to slum-clearance tenants at rents higher than those of cottages, in an attempt to directly reflect higher building costs - as occurred in the case of the development of six 8-storey blocks by West Bromwich CBC in 1955-8 on the remote Yew Tree Estate, or in the case of Newcastle CBC's proposal in 1953 for 1,462 multi-storey flats at Longbenton, which was turned down by councillors after lengthy debates and against the advice of their Housing Committee Chairman. Not even the LCC was exempt: one architect recalls that 'there were many stories about tenants at Roehampton moving back to slums in Edgware Road!' 50

In Scotland, the cause of high flats might have been expected to gain reinforcement from the coincidence of flat-living as an urban norm, and a widespread desire among councillors to get away from the old tenement pattern. But, as already explained, during the 1950s, Glasgow Corporation found tenements to be still the most straightforward way of realising a substantial yield quickly from its large peripheral sites, such as Castlemilk and the Eastern Areas. The low rents prevalent in Scottish council housing also affected this issue: councillors were deterred from large-scale building of high flats in the 1950s by the exceptionally high cost of the few prototype schemes which were erected - especially in relation to the cheapness of new tenements, which were more economical to build even than terraces of cottages. 51

Distrust of multi-storey flats among councillors throughout Britain was also reinforced during the 1950s by a growing professional chorus of
disquiet concerning high flats, voiced by groups such as housing reformers, housing managers, architects and sociologists. Councillors were most directly influenced by one claim in particular, commonly made by these groups: that high blocks were unsuitable for families with children. This view had become an established housing-management orthodoxy by the end of the decade, despite the inconclusiveness of the evidence gathered by English sociologists such as Willis, or emanating from abroad. Although housing managers contributed precious little to building policy in many production-minded municipalities, those in a few major cities, such as J.P. Macey of Birmingham and S.I. Benson of Leeds, began to exert an inhibiting influence, from around 1960, on any enthusiasm for multi-storey building among councillors. 52
This chapter has traced the origins of a municipal response in Britain to the 'land trap' of the late 1940s and 1950s, and has shown that this was based on the adaptation, for production purposes, of the high blocks which had originally been devised by LCC designers. The next four chapters will explain how, from these uncertain beginnings, the great adventure of Modern 'mass housing' got underway across Britain, and gathered pace into the early 1960s.

The next chapters will return repeatedly to one key issue: the relationship between local and national influences on housing production. For an apparent contradiction runs through this story. It has been claimed above that authority after authority turned to high flats as its escape from the 'land trap'. Given the universality of the solution adopted for these individual municipal land crises - exploitation of piecemeal sites with multi-storey blocks - how can one possibly attribute this nationwide movement chiefly to the influence of local initiatives and individuals? Surely it is more sensible to conclude that this seemingly homogeneous pattern must have been 'imposed' on particular localities from outside, or from above? As was demonstrated in the Introduction, most recent historians have reached precisely this conclusion. Relying on the time-honoured Unwinian assumptions of the 'irrationality' and 'diminishing returns' of high blocks, they have claimed that local municipalities misguided enough to build them must therefore have been duped by external influences. F.J. Osborn had argued that 'this is partly a class matter... one could develop a Marxist theory of the thing', and identified 'architect-journalist lizards' as the chief culprits. As we saw, other 'conspirators', such as the central State or the building industry, have been pinpointed by more recent writers. Almost all of these accounts have echoed Osborn's dismissive view of municipal culture, and have characterised local councillors or officers as mere puppets, powerlessly acting out a 'pre-structured' pattern.
The next chapter will demonstrate that the reverse was in fact the case. Central Government had helped set the 'land trap'. But it did not prescribe the solution to this problem, a solution which would sweep the country: self-contained building within authorities' boundaries, rather than overspill. The driving forces of Modern 'mass housing' in Britain were big cities with serious perceived housing problems, in which the public housing 'numbers game' had, since 1919, taken strongest hold. In such large local authorities, powerful housing factions consciously, decisively and autonomously engineered the sharp policy change of a move to high blocks, in an attempt to maintain output. A variety of motives lay behind this initiative, ranging from a hard-headed anxiety to preserve rateable value and municipal power, to an idealistic determination to 'rehouse the people'. Usually these local-authority housing factions were led by councillors - group leaders or housing committee chairmen; their initiatives, in most cases, also enjoyed strong organisational support from dynamic, production-minded officers, such as engineers, architects, or Town Clerks.

Certainly, these groups of councillors and officers often had qualms about the building of flats, especially multi-storey flats. These were overcome not by external pressure, but by the obvious quantitative advantages of high blocks as a way of satisfying the chief municipal political issue: how to obtain maximum output of new dwellings. In some large Labour-controlled authorities, party-political considerations also undoubtedly strengthened councillors' desire to frustrate the 'land trap' and retain their working-class population; but the vigorous multi-storey programmes of predominantly Conservative authorities such as Portsmouth or Brighton show that this motive provides only a partial explanation. We will see that, within many active authorities, the role of the officers was characterised by deep-running differences. The cause of production was promoted by the borough engineers or output-minded architects, who helped establish, maintain and reinforce high building levels. The advocates of design, on the other hand, were confined to impotent grumbling while the 'housers' cheerfully pillaged the stock of Modern 'high-density' dwelling types devised by the LCC designers, pocketing the multi-storey blocks but discarding the mixed-
development sociology. The forcefulness and single-mindedness of those concerned with housing output will constantly be contrasted, throughout this story, with the largely unsuccessful attempts of designers (architects and planners) to restrain housing production, or to modify it in their own interests.

The next chapter examines relations between Central Government and the municipalities concerning the direction of housing output, during the 1950s - the time when the cities were formulating their response to the 'land trap', through the massed building of high flats. We will find that the Government in no way took the lead in this policy change, but instead played the role of a sometimes doubtful helpmate to the cities, as the latter plunged vigorously into large-scale production of these costly housing types.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 1

1 Sandys and Green Belts: Minister’s statement 26-4-1955; Circular 42/55, 3-8-1955; Circular 50/57. ‘Do battle’ HLG 71/1656 Secretary-EAS 8-2-1952. Higher Density manual: HLG 71/1656 EAS-Minister 1-12-1951 on economies envisaged.


3 F. Jackson, Sir Raymond Unwin, 1985; M. K. Miller, To Speak of Planning is to Speak of Unwin, 1981 (PhD, University of Birmingham); M. Swanarton, Artisans and Architects, 1989, pp. 126-166.


5 ‘Monomaniac[s]’: int. A. Reiach. 'Gave the impression': int. Beddoe.


16 LCC lack of hostility to overspill: HC 28-7-1953. Braddock 'If it is intended': Chow, op. cit., p. 44. Braddock opposition to overspill after failure to secure town development subsidy for Kirkby: Braddocks, p. 119.

17 Newcastle and overspill: Council 9-1-1952, 4-3-1953, 1-4-1953.


20 Irrationality: Bristol CBC in mid-1950s turned much of its programme over to flats with the city’s average density only 30-50 p.p.a. and a boundary extension just secured: Dunleavy, p. 308.


22 MHLG on 100ppa attainable at 4 storeys: HLG 101/816 27-6-1956 SWCP-Minister.

23 'Madness': int. Cox.


28 'Iron grip', 'ruthless apparatus': P. Taaffe, T. Mulhearn, Liverpool, a city that dared to fight, 1988, p. 36. Braddocks on popular distrust of high flats: Braddocks, pp. 119-123. Claim that Liverpool high flats were foisted on council by Bradbury: Owens, pp. 423-5.


30 LCC 'horrified': int. Denington.

31 Int. former LCC and Leeds architect.


34 'Lumpiest things', 'Wimpey Town': int. Sheppard Fidler.


36 1950s Green Belt releases: SRO DD6-269 9-12-1951 Galbraith meeting with Corporation... 'Always came back to the target': int. Jury.

37 'Sharp perception': int. Rendle.

39 Letter 2-12-1957 Jury-Town Clerk (covering letter to Report); First Quinquennial Review, 1960, pp.124, 132, for the only mention of non-CDA hsg.


42 'Endless complications': SRO DD12/1156 Fleming-Rendle 2-12-1958, on the protracted negotiations for Blairdardie South scheme.

43 'Puncture...': SRO DD12/1156, note of 22-6-1958 and further correspondence of 1956-1959; also SRO DD12-1735, correspondence of 17, 18-11-1958; Int. L. Bunton, Grieve, Nicoll.


46 HR September-October 1958 (Percival at conference); see M. Horsey, S. Muthesius, Provincial Mixed Development, 1956, pp. 11-35.


48 Austen Bent: Int. Stones.


50 Multi-storey letting difficulties: West Bromwich CBC General Purposes Committee 2-4-58, Wolverhampton CBC Joint Health, Housing, Town
'There were many...': int. Gilmour.

51 SRO DD6-321 13-10-1954 meeting.


53 Local authorities duped: Dunleavy, p. 178 ('cumulative rationality deficit'). Osborn on 'class matter', Letters, op. cit., Osborn-Mumford 15-2-1963, 23-7-1957. Dunleavy, p. 348, on 'pre-structured' pattern, p. 346 on councillors as pawns of 'non-local structural forces'. B. Finnimore, p. 245 ('systems' as Government initiative prompted by 'fear of revolution in society'). Prince Charles, A Vision of Britain, 1989, pp. 9, 21, 36-42 (architects 'set the entire agenda'). Owens, pp. 419-425 (Marxist view of mixed development as palliative devised by architects to mask the otherwise unacceptable use of high blocks 'to obtain the densities required by the capitalist city'). Other similar interpretations alleging conspiracy, manipulation or coercion by various groupings or classes: Merrett; Marmot; Coleman; R. Bacon, Park Hill in its Social Context, 1985 (Sheffield University Department of Town and Regional Planning Paper 63); N. M. Day, The Rise of the Architect in State Housing, 1988 (PhD, Warwick University).
CHAPTER 2: CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING PRODUCTION IN THE 1950s

'This was a great democratic drive, which Governments were unable to resist, or influence beyond a certain degree!' P. C. Rendle

What was the effect of the policies of Central Government during the 1950s on the direction of the Modern housing drive in Britain? So far, this account has only touched indirectly on this issue, by identifying the involvement of Government planners and sympathetic Administrators in the central-local 'vertical coalition' which established the decentralist 'land trap'. This chapter, by contrast, is concerned specifically with Government housing policies - drawn up and implemented by Ministers and departmental Housing Administrators - and with the relationship between these and the production activity of the large housebuilding municipalities.

One single question dominates this chapter. From the mid-1950s onwards, once the 'land trap' had been set, was it the intentions and actions of the Government, particularly in the area of subsidy policy, which decisively pushed British cities to respond to the land crisis by the massed building of multi-storey flats?

The answer to this question, it will be seen, is a resounding negative. Some central Government housing initiatives did have an effect of reinforcing the general atmosphere of land crisis: notable among these was the turn to slum-clearance in the mid 1950s, which compounded the inhibiting effect already exerted on suburban greenfield development by the planners' zoning restrictions. But the move to high flats was not a matter of the general climate of housing policy, but a very specific innovation concerning the kind of housing built. Here it will be found that the Government was unable to impose or prescribe specific building policies, with the exception of the most minor modifications to individual schemes. The decision to start building of high flats was a prime example of a major, turning-point issue of building policy, and, as already suggested in the previous chapter, the initiative here came
from a relatively small number of big cities and other large municipalities. It was they, alarmed at the threat of population loss, that made the unconstrained decision that, if output was to be revived, multi-storey building was the way to achieve it. Breathlessly, the housing interests within the Government trailed along in their wake, opportunistically devising rules and subsidies to legitimise and assist the snowballing demand to build multi-storey blocks - on which Ministers increasingly came to depend for the attainment of their 'national' output figures.

But the municipally-led movement for higher output did not gain universal backing within the Government. Indeed, at exactly the same time as Ministers and Housing Administrators were giving free rein to output, the branches of MHLG or DHS concerned with architecture and planning began to put forward a succession of initiatives intended to promote the design viewpoint in housing, or to relate housing to grand schemes of national replanning or 'modernisation'. Some of these interventions attempted to divert the direction of the local-authority housing drive away from high flats; but the power of the big cities made certain that this would not impede the push for numbers, at least until the late 1960s.

In examining the question of Government influence over public housing production, one must start by identifying the means theoretically available to the Government in pursuing any policy initiative in this field. There existed a number of seemingly relevant administrative and legislative provisions: these varied not only over time, but also between England and Wales on the one hand and Scotland on the other. It should be emphasised that, while Welsh housing administration was later devolved to a separate Welsh Office in 1964, during the 1950s it remained part of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

The most direct Government influence on public housebuilding was, of course, exerted (in Scotland only) by that nationwide agency, the Scottish Special Housing Association. This non-departmental organisation, financed entirely through Government grant and rent
revenue, with substantial annual deficits, built about 10% of postwar public housing in Scotland. The Government used the SSHA as a regulator of housebuilding levels, partly covering its own lack of influence over the large Labour authorities. But the hostility of the large municipalities towards the SSHA, and the Association's consistently lukewarm attitude towards high flats, relegated it to a peripheral status within Scotland's Modern housing drive - especially by comparison with the decisive role of its Northern Ireland equivalent, the Northern Ireland Housing Trust.

But the central theme of this chapter is the relationship between the Government and local authority housebuilding in Britain. Here the Government tried to exert influence in two ways: firstly, by attempts to directly regulate housing policy and even the types of housing built; and secondly, through Exchequer subsidies with conditions attached.

In the area of regulation, it will be argued that the British Government's power to direct housing production, other than in the most general or the most trivial terms, was in practice restricted by organisational incapacity in England and Wales and political weakness in Scotland. At the one extreme, the general level of building could be influenced, for instance, by interest rate policy. At the other, the vetting of tenders for loan-sanction purposes, or initial appraisals of proposals by Government architects and planners, might be used to secure particular alterations in schemes as designed (although loan sanction procedures did not apply to Britain's largest housebuilding authority, the LCC). But it will be seen that the Government had no regulatory means available which could make local authorities adopt a particular building type.

The effects of subsidy policy in Britain were much more complicated - especially in contrast to the Northern Ireland Government's vigorous and successful use of subsidies to spur the generally weak local authorities into large-scale building. In Britain, although subsidy changes could, over time, influence broad levels and directions of housebuilding (as in the 1950s move to slum clearance) they proved a much less significant
factor in the encouragement of particular building types than the enthusiasm of the large authorities. Although the latter were reluctant to build without subsidy, they could always neutralise minor subsidy changes in the short or medium term by pooling rents or subsidies on existing properties, or by drawing further on rate revenue.

Special additional multi-storey subsidies, for instance, were only introduced in the mid 1950s following intense pressure from cities set on building many high flats, and were designed merely to cancel out their extra cost compared to that of cottages or low flats. Whether a particular subsidy provision of this sort was widely taken up, was almost entirely up to the cities: there was almost always a range of alternative subsidies available, some potentially in conflict with others. For instance, the Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act 1957 introduced separate subsidies for both multi-storey flats and overspill dwellings. The overspill subsidy could have been used by Glasgow Corporation’s Planning and Overspill Committees as the basis for forcing through the enormous programme of population dispersal demanded by the planners, and officially endorsed by the Government. But, as will be seen below, it was the much more powerful Housing Committee which decisively exploited the other subsidy, for high flats, as the basis of a crash-drive of multi-storey building intended to neutralise that very threat of overspill. It is, incidentally, for this same reason - that specific subsidies for Modern flats were shaped by local-authority predilections and demands, rather than the other way round - that there is no systematic discussion of building costs in this account.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, this same conclusion will be frequently restated - that the British Government, during the 1950s, was unable to determine the particular building policies of large local authorities. Only in the late 1960s - at the very end of our story - would it become possible to use subsidy manipulation to impose specific and significant changes in building type - by the use of the 'yardstick' in England and Wales to discourage multi-storey building. But ironically, of course, this new power would partly result from the very
success of the local authority-led Modern housing drive in satisfying the political clamour for numbers, thus undermining the power of the municipal 'housing crusaders' to ride roughshod over the objections of central and local Government designers!
GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN THE 'FIFTIES: SLUM CLEARANCE REVIVAL

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, a permanent public housebuilding programme was fully established in Britain for the first time since Addison. During those years, two waves of 'general needs' building had attempted to cater for the 1939-51 adult population growth of one million and household growth of two million. Although these production-orientated building campaigns were broadly 'traditional' in architectural form, the seeds of Modern architectural change were planted by designers, chiefly in the LCC. A roughly parallel process of innovation took place in Government housing policy, where a turn began from large-scale general-needs building to a revival of slum-clearance.

During the 'general needs' housing drives of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the busy tenement-building activity of the LCC, the Metropolitan Boroughs and Glasgow Corporation took place in the context of Government attitudes, and subsidy provisions (contained in 1946 legislation), which represented no great break with the past. Bevan's private secretary recalls that the attitude of the Minister and senior Administrators towards the building of flats in England and Wales was 'a straight continuation of 1939 thinking... there was no special drive for flats, they were just one of those things that occurred in big cities!' Apart from isolated interventions, such as DHS's suggestion that Glasgow might build an experimental high block and Bevan's equivalent advice to Liverpool (both in 1945), there was very little direct Government interest in the building of high flats by the cities. This situation remained almost unchanged during the early 1950s campaign to raise output - the so-called 'People's House' policy (in England and Wales, devised by Dalton and elaborated by Macmillan), which cut the size and cost of dwellings (almost all cottages and low flats), while at the same time substantially raising basic subsidies. In short, the Government's first postwar efforts to increase public housing output and set national 'target' figures, were not associated with any concerted attempt to encourage the building of Modern high flats.
The mid-1950s, however, saw the beginnings of a significant change of Government policy in England and Wales, and, to a lesser extent, in Scotland. This change created a climate potentially more favourable to multi-storey housing: but it still cannot be said in any way to have 'caused' the high-flat boom.

In England and Wales, MHLG began to attempt, through administrative and subsidy changes, to discourage general-needs council housebuilding and redirect authorities' efforts towards slum-clearance. Taken in conjunction with the existing Green Belt and dispersal policies, this could only further intensify the pressure on large authorities' land supply. This new policy emphasis had readily-identifiable qualitative and quantitative causes.

The qualitative cause was a feeling in the Ministry that Macmillan's hectic programme had provided sufficient elbow-room to allow a redirection of suburban land supply to private builders, and a concentration by local authorities on their slum problems: 'There had been a heavy rate of building by local authorities, and we had an illusion that the pressure was becoming less urgent: you could choose'. At the same time, there were also moves to encourage improvement, rather than demolition of existing dwellings, but for various reasons (which we shall briefly discuss in Part III) this policy did not, for the time being, prove attractive to local authorities.

Quantitatively, the mid and later 1950s saw a succession of moves to restrain and then reduce output. These were imposed on MHLG by the Treasury, which relentlessly pressured in 1955-6 for a reduction in the public housebuilding target from 120,000 to 100,000. As a sop to the Chancellor, the Minister of Housing, Duncan Sandys, agreed to the progressive reduction and elimination of the general needs subsidy. He was, however, anxious to avoid any impression of supineness towards the Treasury. Therefore, he put up a show of resistance at each stage of this process, and succeeded in wrongfooting the Chancellor a mere two days before the abolition announcement by insisting, without prior notice, on the retention of subsidy for one-bedroomed dwellings.
MHLLG's cavalier attitude towards the general-needs subsidy reductions was caused by officials' private conviction that (with the continuing availability of subsidy for slum-clearance building) the abolition of general-needs subsidy, especially for flats of four or more storeys, would not make a large difference to the output of large urban authorities. In the first six months of 1956, for instance, a mere 5,284 such flats had been started in England and Wales, where there existed 307,542 slum dwellings. Housing Administrators did not see the new emphasis on slum-clearance as some kind of concealed 'cut' in building, but as a welcome way of bolstering the power of the largest county boroughs at the expense of the small fry, within the overall context of land shortage.

However, real output reductions, amounting to 20% over the whole country, were demanded by the Treasury during the brief economic squeeze from late 1957 to mid 1958. Now MHLLG realised that cuts could no longer be averted by sophistic juggling with subsidy definitions; but the Ministry still tried to protect the big cities. The overall reduction, which eventually added up to less than 20%, was concentrated, by manipulation of allocations, on smaller and rural authorities, in order to leave large slum-clearance and overspill programmes as little affected as possible. But the severity of the land situation in many conurbations by this stage was shown by the fact that, despite these well-intended Ministry attempts at assistance, the output of many large cities fell during the late 1950s by more, rather than less, than the annual national average - sometimes by over a half.

The move away from general needs subsidies in England and Wales would prove a short-lived policy, abandoned in 1961 - although the emphasis on slum clearance and on channelling support to the largest authorities was destined to endure throughout the 1960s. Between 1956 and 1961, however, the new policies were eagerly adopted by many towns. Some active Conservative or 'non-political' authorities of large or medium size, such as Brighton CBC, Gosport MBC or Cardiff RDC, were anxious to strike out in new directions. Land and local building resources could be made available to speculative housebuilders, while the authority
commenced slum clearance; or blocks of flats could be built for letting to lower middle-class tenants at higher rents. On the other hand, a variety of Labour-controlled councils, such as Salford, Manchester, Oldham or even Norwich, had cleared the bulk of their overcrowding and waiting-list backlogs, and were prepared, for the time being, to tolerate reduced programmes devoted to the clearance of unfit, yet not overcrowded housing. In both the above categories of municipalities, this policy change towards slum-clearance habitually resulted in commencement of redevelopment schemes and an increased proportion of flats, but it was a matter of choice as to how many multi-storey blocks were included, or even whether they were included at all.

Multi-storey building seemed a more attractive option in towns where land shortage coincided with a continuing high level of slum overcrowding, as this created a vicious circle in the decanting of slum-dwellers to alternative accommodation. The overcrowding meant that more replacement houses would be needed than already existed in the slum areas (a liability which would become progressively more onerous as clearance spread); yet the 'land trap' would all the time reduce authorities' options in the location of the replacement housing. In other words, any clearance would be effectively 'ring-fenced'.

Such a combination of constraints undoubtedly contributed to the beginnings of gap-site multi-storey building in provincial cities such as Liverpool (III. 28); but the problem was at its worst in the London area. This was partly caused by MHLG's deletions of suburban land allocations for council housing - a policy partly compensated for by rezoning of redundant industrial sites for residential use. Denington recalls one instance of the type of public housing site that the LCC Housing Committee was increasingly compelled to make use of: 'One day, Percy Johnson-Marshall [then Group Planning Officer responsible for Stepney-Poplar] came to the Committee and reported, "I have an ideal site, according to the Ministry's thinking, to show the Committee today!" They all sat up and looked so pleased - but I'd already seen it at the call-in! He went on, "It's a curiously shaped site, roughly triangular, quite small. On this side is a high-level railway viaduct;
Multi-storey building for slum-clearance in the 'fifties. 1959 perspective of Birkenhead CBC's Eldon Street/Oak Street development: two 10-storey blocks built from 1956 by Thornton in 'Prometo' construction.
on this side is an enormous great brewery; and on this side is a
gasworks!" Just about all we could build on that site was a single high
block! "

There were several ways in which these hard-pressed municipalities could
try to offset the compounding effect of slum decanting on their land
shortage. One, of course, was the building of multi-storey blocks in
their own right. It did not have to be pointed out to councillors by
the Ministry or anyone else that high flats might make possible a self-
contained process of decanting within slum clearance areas.
Alternatively, if overcrowding was too great to permit this, use of
multi-storey blocks might at least enable some of the excess population
to be absorbed on small gap sites.

So the multi-storey block was now eagerly embraced by a wide range of
authorities, some of which had never before attempted to build flats on
any scale, or, indeed, to mount any continuous housing drive. Within
the County of London, building of flats up to 8 or 10 storeys in height
was now well established, as a legacy of the Walker era; but LCC
planners vigorously tried to prevent the Metropolitan Boroughs from
pursuing any piecemeal multi-storey redevelopment. In 1960, the
boroughs' collective mouthpiece, the Metropolitan Boroughs Standing
Joint Committee (MBSJC), succeeded in pressurising the Ministry to issue
a circular (37/60) calling for limited increases in zoned densities as
part of Development Plan reviews. However, even this initiative, as
will be seen in a later chapter, was to be partly frustrated by the LCC.

Immediately outside the County, however, the story was different.
Croydon CBC, for instance, was a large outer-suburban authority whose
cottage building programme of the late 1940s and early 1950s was
abruptly terminated by Green Belt curbs in 1955. From that point, the
Borough's ruthless 'managing director', Alderman Sir James Marshall,
redirected his authority's energies into redevelopment of Croydon's
relatively few slum areas: multi-storey blocks were erected on any
available gap-site. In complete contrast stood another prominent
Greater London authority, Willesden MBC. Willesden was already 'ring-fenced', as it had never had sufficient land supply to make possible large-scale building before the war; and now Middlesex planners had raised the spectre of 17% population overspill. Accordingly, from the mid 1950s, the Borough's new and energetic young leader, Alderman Reginald Freeson, began to build up the decanting momentum of the South Kilburn redevelopment area, by opportunistic use of multi-storey blocks on gap-sites, whether situated within the area or outside. To a man such as Freeson, the LCC ideal of carefully-designed 'comprehensive' redevelopment, at the expense of immediate housing gain, cut little ice: 'Let's get ahead! If you've got a site, don't muck about - get moving, straight away!' 

Three other loopholes, however, were also of assistance to boroughs afflicted with combined slum and overcrowding problems: none was linked directly to use of high flats. Firstly, councils could plough on regardless with general needs construction, drawing on rent pooling or cross-subsidy from the rate fund, economising on building costs where they could, and (within the LCC area) leaving any slum-clearance to the County Council. Such municipalities included Fulham MBC, whose programme of about 600 dwellings built from 1956-61 only included 130 eligible for slum-clearance subsidy; or the extreme case of Deptford MBC, which, despite repeated Ministry entreaties and threats, and the existence within its boundaries of some of London's 'worst slums' (especially the notorious Mud Island area), flatly refused to undertake any slum-clearance whatever, and erected some 400 dwellings without subsidy between 1956 and 1961. By 1960, indeed, some MHLG Administrators were going so far as to assert that the stopping of subsidies would have only a 'trifling effect' in the short term on the housing finances of large authorities. But, it should immediately be cautioned, the proportion of public housing in England and Wales erected without subsidy during this period was small. At the end of 1958, MHLG Housing Administrators calculated that, out of around 250,000 public authority dwellings in the pipeline, 6% were being erected without subsidy, 67% came under the slum-clearance heading, 8% were in New Towns, 4% were town-development overspill dwellings, 2% were in
connection with new industry, 8% were one-bedroom general-needs housing, and 5% were other general needs dwellings approved before 1956.

A second loophole concealed a measure of general-needs building within the two-thirds of the programme officially labelled 'slum clearance'. This was made possible by the system of 'displacements', under which the number of slum demolitions could be saved up as credit to be used against any new dwellings within a given time, regardless of whether the actual displaced families had meantime been re-accommodated through relets. The original time limit was two years; this was subsequently extended to three under pressure from Bermondsey MBC and the MBSJC, and eventually became so flexible as to tide many authorities over until the restoration of the general needs subsidy in 1961.

The third shortcut was to concentrate on clearance of decayed and partly depopulated areas whose redevelopment would actually yield a housing gain, as was frequently the case in old Industrial Revolution towns in the Midlands. Even in London, several boroughs succeeded in devising a cunning way to create useful housing gain, by exploiting the LCC's commitment to rehouse at least 50% of all slum-clearance overspill. In 1956, to the County's horror, boroughs such as Bethnal Green MBC began to clear numbers of 'fit' houses (houses which did not qualify as 'slums') to create worthwhile sites: their aim was to make some impact on their growing problem of unfit 19th-century tenements.

To reiterate: the Government, through alterations to subsidies and regulations, encouraged a change in the focus of the housing programme towards tackling slum conditions. But it did not compel authorities to adopt a policy of large-scale building of high flats, in preference to other officially-endorsed policies such as population overspill, or, for that matter, housing improvement - a policy ceaselessly promoted by Ministers and supported by numerous initiatives and new subsidies during the first two postwar decades. Rather, it was obvious to any large municipality seeking to protect or expand production that high blocks, used piecemeal on small cleared areas or gap sites, had now provided an
astonishingly straightforward way to circumvent the inflexibility of the slum decanting process. Authorities up and down the country eagerly grasped at this sudden godsend, brushing aside the 'diminishing returns' objections of planners. In a 'ring-fenced' slum area, there was now a new and simple method of proceeding with decanting and clearance, which would provide the inhabitants with Modern homes as quickly as possible without any need for wholesale population overspill. 'Firstly, you had to create the holes to put a tower block up, which you did by pulling a couple of streets down. Then you put in the block, and commenced pulling down the rest of the area!'
SCOTLAND: GENERAL NEEDS SURVIVAL

The strength of the tenement tradition had inhibited a wholesale turn to multi-storey building, by allowing high output to be kept up throughout the 1950s. Equally, the Government's policy change in favour of slum-clearance in the mid-1950s also had a less extreme impact in Scotland, because DHS continued to tolerate large-scale general-needs building. The halting start to slum-clearance, in its turn, further diminished any encouragement to make a substantial start on high building during the 1950s. But, paradoxically, Government policy in Scotland, with its almost exclusive emphasis on public housing provision, would substantially increase the pent-up force of Glasgow's high-flat drive when it was eventually unleashed after 1960.

The great power of senior Scottish Office civil servants made it possible for them to evolve consistent Departmental policies, almost irrespective of the views of individual Ministers. This continuity derived not from one-party political rule (as in the case of Northern Ireland) but from the breadth of Ministers' responsibilities, and from the national tradition of consensus policies on subjects such as housing and education. The planning-minded central-local coalition within DHS and Glasgow, centred around McGuinness and Grieve, had swept Ministers into a grandiose programme of planned overspill. But there was another, more ingrained central-local consensus in the administration of Scottish housing, a consensus destined to come into fundamental conflict with the consensus of decentralism: namely, the tacit agreement between Housing Administrators and powerful municipalities that a high level of building should be maintained, while rents should be kept low.

Thus, in the 1940s and early 1950s, Scottish subsidies had gradually established an edge over their English counterparts, and few authorities diverged significantly from the high-output, low-rent pattern. Although the Department of Health, like MHLG, had secured slum-clearance legislation in 1954, and revised subsidies in the 1957 Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act, there was no question of any wholesale abandonment of general needs housebuilding - despite MHLG's constant
grumbles about the resulting 'awkward' variance, and the Treasury's growing exasperation at the 'hopelessly uneconomic' basis of Scottish housing finance. The Department's official pronouncements, for Whitehall consumption, made skilful use of the 'league-table' arguments first introduced in the 1917 Royal Commission Report. DHS's position was summarised in 1957 by junior Minister Nixon Browne, in a note to Brooke which set out 'the grim facts about a grim situation'. Browne claimed that Scotland was 'not much further on in 1951 than England and Wales in 1931 - still a general shortage of houses and not by any means solely slum-clearance. In Glasgow, 100,000 houses are needed (less than half of these to replace unfit houses)'. The much wider scope of Scottish council housing provision, reinforced by the Labour Government's ruthless and politically-motivated employment of building licensing in the 1940s to nip in the bud any private enterprise revival in Scotland, meant that public housebuilding was now the only practical way to tackle this housing shortage, seemingly unparalleled in Britain.

The overcrowding and slum problem was made much worse by the combined effects of rent control and owners' rates - 'like a wet blanket over everything'. Entire districts of tenements, including some built only shortly before the destruction of the private-rented housing structure in 1915, were now in headlong decline: this led, inexorably, to the breakdown of factoring and cessation of maintenance. Speaking of these 'inhabited ruins', Glasgow's Town Clerk Depute pointed to the paradoxes created by the Government's blundering wartime intervention in working-class housing provision: 'Forty years ago there were many empty houses but few abandoned by their owners. Today there are no empty houses yet many have been abandoned by their owners'. New housing, on the other hand, was now dominated by vast council schemes, which catered for lower middle class and working class, skilled and unskilled alike: this contrasted markedly with the emphasis in Northern Ireland and England on 'spec' suburbia and 'filtering' down of older dwellings for working-class occupancy. Towards the end of the 1950s owner-occupation stood at a quarter of the rate south of the border; by 1968, only 4% of new post-World War II dwellings in Glasgow had been built for private owners!
1963, R.D. Cramond listed several key reasons for the low level of private building: 'the influence of tradition, the old rating system, the level of local authority rents, the lack of competition, and the monopoly of sites zoned for private house building by a very few firms'. Nor was the SSHA's contribution to public housing production in Scotland (around 10%) of startling significance, especially in contrast with the relatively much more energetic progress of its equivalent across the water, the Northern Ireland Housing Trust. 17

In fact, the extraordinary strength of municipal housing provision in post-World War II Scotland was only paralleled in Eastern Europe. In 'Western' countries (whose postwar low-rental housing has been, on the whole, dominated by housing associations, subsidised private companies or semi-autonomous public organisations such as the French HLM societies or the Hong Kong Housing Authority), the chief precursor had been the interwar building drive of the municipality of Vienna. The importance of Scottish local-authority housing schemes as citadels of municipal patronage, and entrenched Labour Party power, was reinforced by the steady fall in the real level of rents: this was made possible by the unrestricted subsidy from the rates which had been possible since 1935. Between 1938 and 1960, average Scottish council house rents declined from 48% to 31% of the cost of providing a dwelling, compared to English urban averages, in 1960, which ranged from 55% to 73%. In 1959, the average weekly rent of a Scottish council house was just 8s. 7d., and that of even an SSHA house 12s. 7d.; this may be compared to average public-housing rents of 19s. 3d. in England and Wales and 16s. 3d. in Northern Ireland. 18

In Glasgow itself, with average weekly rents of 12s. 3d., there was little chance that the Corporation would emulate Birmingham's abolition of the rate subsidy in 1963: the latter had raised its weekly rents to 44s. for prewar and 49s. for postwar dwellings. By the late 1950s, most large Scottish authorities were devoting a much, much higher share of rate poundage to housing than equivalent large industrial cities elsewhere in the UK. In 1958, for instance, 3s. 11d. in the £ of Glasgow's rates revenue was absorbed by housing; the highest
corresponding proportion elsewhere was that of Liverpool (1s. 6d.), while Birmingham, Manchester and Belfast allocated, respectively, only 10d., 8d., and 5d. in the £ to housing. The only Scottish city closer to the English pattern was Progressive-controlled Edinburgh, whose housing burden was 1s. 1d. 15

A comparison between the per-capita building levels of large local authorities in Scotland, and those in other parts of the UK, is quite revealing. At December 1964, for instance, the highest cumulative total of postwar council housing in England (that of Sunderland CBC), was substantially exceeded in Scotland by the totals of no less than four large burghs (Airdrie, Coatbridge, Dumfries and Motherwell) and three counties (Ayr, Stirling and West Lothian). The vigorous building by the cities and large burghs, when added to the massive programmes of the Labour-controlled county councils (a telling contrast to the fragmentation of English rural building) and the 10% contribution of the SSHA, fuelled a proportionally much higher level of public housebuilding over Scotland as a whole - around twice that of England and Wales over all postwar years to 1975. During the second half of the 1950s, when English output was being 'squeezed' by Treasury pressure to about 70% of the 1951-5 level, Scottish output declined by only about half that proportion.

So the options for reform of housing policy reform available to the Department of Health were limited: to nibble at the slums by gradual clearance, abolition of owners' rates and gentle rent rises, through a modest Scottish appendix to Brooke's 1957 Rent Act; and to chip tentatively at the council-housing monolith by overspill, subsidy reductions, SSHA building and, again, gentle rent rises. Any radical ideas on the part of Ministers, such as economic-rent multi-storey flats, were firmly suppressed by Administrators. Therefore, in the absence of a healthy private sector, no DHS initiative (especially if susceptible to municipal portrayal as a potential brake on housebuilding) could escape the long shadow of Glasgow Corporation and its satellites. Their housebuilding and letting policies were driven on by those 'warring barons', the bailies and councillors: 'Glasgow
Corporation was *the* power in the land — no Minister sitting in Edinburgh could do much about Glasgow! 

Doubtless, the diversity of the Scottish Office's responsibilities made possible great policy continuity, and allowed the administrative elite autonomy to develop departmental traditions — in contrast to MHLG, with its administrative fragmentation and vulnerability to political interventions. But the civil servants' power in Scotland was only one element in a wider national-local balance, in which the powerful grouping of mostly Labour-controlled large burghs and cities often rivalled the influence of Central Government as a whole in housing policy. The Treasury viewed the Department's accommodation of these authorities' low-rent, high-output and anti-dispersal policies with thinly-disguised contempt. Despite the high cost of overspill, the Treasury saw the alternative of a colossal building programme by spendthrift Glasgow as far worse. They warned Stuart that pandering to the Housing Committee would run up vast liabilities to the Exchequer, and might leave the Secretary of State in an exposed position within the Government, as a 'scapegoat for Glasgow... to cover up for their [the Housing Committee's] grotesque shortsightedness... in assuming for years in the teeth of all the evidence that all Glaswegians could be rehoused in Glasgow'.
THE MULTI-STOREY SUBSIDY: CAUSE OR EFFECT?

'The one thing the Government could do was dole out the multi-storey subsidy — and multi-storey flats were the symbol of local-authority independence!' Dr. J. Dickson Mabon 22

The Government policy innovation which many have pointed to as most relevant to the spread of multi-storey flats in Britain was the special subsidy for high flats introduced by MHLG in 1956 and emulated, with variations, by DHS in 1957. The Ministry's subsidy comprised stepped supplements increasing in parallel with building height; the Scottish supplements were variable, and covered two-thirds of any excess over the cost of an 'average' dwelling. Some historians, such as Dunleavy, have pointed to these subsidies as conclusive proof that Central Government was the main initial instigator of large-scale multi-storey building — and have then gone on to indict the 'irrationality' of such a policy, on the basis that the Government was already well aware of the 'fantastic' extra cost of high blocks compared to that of the standard tenement flat or two-storey house. In reality, however, the subsidies provided proof not of the hegemony of central Government over municipalities, but of the enduring political and administrative power of the big cities — now used to secure Government financial support for the high-flat building which they had decided to use to extricate them from the 'land trap'.

The main reason for the Government's introduction of the first special multi-storey subsidies in 1956, was the increasingly urgent wish, and demand, of some large municipalities to build high blocks anywhere within their boundaries rather than only in the central slum-clearance areas: the existing site cost and flats subsidies only applied to expensive sites. This pressure had begun to bite several years beforehand, in 1953. The prime mover was Birmingham Corporation, although other county boroughs such as Newcastle upon Tyne CBC also contributed pressure on the Ministry. Birmingham's House Building Committee had become anxious that its programme might soon be 'governed
by the redevelopment of the central areas', and therefore decided to start construction of large numbers of Manzoni's 6-storey 'mud pies' in the outer suburbs. But these sites would be located on cheap farmland - and so, paradoxically, the Corporation would face a serious financial loss on any such developments. So the City's leadership bluntly applied its political muscle to encourage MHLG to introduce on the spot an appropriate 'discretionary expensive-site flats subsidy' for five test-case blocks, at Cranes Park and Ward End Hall. (III. 29) Sheppard Fidler, newly appointed City Architect, was astounded at this seemingly effortless exercise of municipal power: 'They said, "Look, Minister, you've got to change this! We're the City of Birmingham, not some tiddly little country town - we want these rules changed!" And he did! I was staggered - I thought it was fantastic!' 24

Once Birmingham had created this new loophole, and had pushed its large multi-storey programme through it, MHLG realised, to its dismay, that a queue of other authorities was already forming behind, in the expectation that their suburban schemes, too, could now be administratively redesignated 'expensive sites'. Such cases included Coventry CBC's Tile Hill development and West Bromwich CBC's Yew Tree estate, both in 1955: equally, the LCC, for reasons not solely related to output, demanded that Roehampton and similar outer-suburban sites should be similarly treated. 25

This anomaly only accentuated the administrative unpopularity, with Ministry and municipalities, of the existing flats and expensive sites subsidies. This was caused by the great complexity of the financial calculations involved, within a context of serious short-staffing within the Ministry. MHLG decided to substitute a simpler high-flats subsidy, divorced from site cost or location, which was intended merely to equalise the cost to the local authority of flats compared with that of cottages. At the same time, the expensive site subsidy, which had only been of real assistance to five inner-London authorities - Holborn, St. Marylebone, Westminster, Chelsea and the City - was recalculated on an administratively more straightforward acreage basis. 26
Cranes Park development, Birmingham, seen in 1987. Two 6-storey Wimpey 'mud pies', built 1953-4: one of Birmingham's two test-cases for the application of 'discretionary expensive sites subsidy' to outer-suburban multi-storey developments.
What, however, was the actual, concrete effect of the 1956 subsidy change? The simultaneous alteration to subsidies for low flats does appear to have encouraged the building of four-storey maisonettes instead of three-storey flats. But the impact of the multi-storey subsidy was much less certain. Although building costs as such are not discussed in this account, the general perception was that the storey-height increases matched costs fairly exactly. There were claims that multi-storey costs levelled off slightly with increased height, creating something of an incentive to build higher. But across England and Wales as a whole, the new subsidies did not provide, and were not intended to provide, any general stimulus to multi-storey building, beyond what was already intended by powerful municipalities. 27

The provision of similar subsidies in Scotland was less urgent, in view of the continued large-scale building of suburban tenements and the consequent dearth of high blocks. Tenements, in contrast to England and Wales, were cheaper to build than cottages, perhaps because of the solidity of older stone-built cottage housing in Scotland, in comparison with the flimsy brick construction of England. Following visits by Administrators and Architects to London, the Department of Health was keen to see a few experimental high blocks built, so that cost guidelines could be drawn up. It was recognised that the two-thirds variable supplement for high flats introduced by the 1957 Act perhaps erred on the generous side, but this was seen strictly as an interim measure, to be superseded once any major multi-storey drive was underway. 28

In many ways, the step-by-step DHS approach to high flat subsidies was little more than a reflection of Glasgow's lack of interest in the subject during the mid-1950s. There had been no pressure from Glasgow for introduction of a multi-storey subsidy; but Administrators were well aware that such pressure might rapidly mount, once the 'land trap' once more hit home at the end of the decade. Ronald Fraser, the Assistant Secretary who drafted the 1957 Act, recollects that 'there was no great agitation from the Corporation, but we saw that Glasgow was going to be the prime area of relevance, given the site problems and the massive
latent demand!" Already, in 1956, the City Architect, Archibald Jury, had deftly sidestepped new national cost and planning guidelines for multi-storey proposals, and had forced DHS to consign future vetting of Glasgow high-flat schemes to a toothless joint working party. And, in its comments on the 1957 Bill draft proposals, the Corporation even suggested that the multi-storey supplement should cover 75% instead of two-thirds of the extra cost of high building: this proposal was unsuccessful, but indicated increasing Corporation interest in high flats. As early as 1955, the Treasury had already resigned itself to the likelihood that Glasgow might, sooner rather than later, attempt to break free into an unrestrained multi-storey building campaign - in which case, they grimly predicted, the Department of Health's Housing Administrators would simply act as a postbox for the Housing Committee's demands. 29
GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES TO PRODUCTION OF MODERN FLATS

Why was it that the British Government, having assisted in the setting of the 'land trap' through its dispersal and slum-clearance policies, then allowed the big cities, during the 1950s, to begin defining and pursuing their own defensive response: the massed building of high flats? The most general reason was simple: that MHLG and DHS lacked the ability and even the inclination to do anything else, now that the wartime and early postwar years of autocratic central interventionism had passed. And, as the Government's actual power to direct the 'national housing drive' atrophied, so the postwar revival in council housebuilding brought with it a resurgence in municipal self-confidence. There were also more particular national reasons for Government incapacity in this area. In the Scottish case, it was accentuated by the political weakness of Unionist Ministers. In the case of England and Wales, it was exacerbated by MHLG's organisational paralysis in the face of so many large and determined municipalities. Here, a particular influence was the equivocal attitude of the Ministry's powerful Permanent Secretary, Dame Evelyn Sharp: she was ill-disposed towards production values, yet unwilling to confront the big cities who espoused them. (I.I. 6)
'IF IN DOUBT, LET THEM GET ON WITH IT!' The Ministry and the Housing Drive in England and Wales

In England and Wales, the enthusiasm of the Housing Minister of the late 1950s, Henry Brooke, to 'identify himself with the slum-clearance programme' and the activities of the large cities was not shared by Dame Evelyn Sharp. She had been unsympathetic from the start towards Macmillan's drive for higher output, and, in particular, towards large-scale urban flat-building, although she was well-inclined towards Gibberdian 'landmark' point-blocks: 'She always felt she'd been stampeded into it... she said what a tragedy it was that Macmillan insisted on so much building and that Labour councils had picked it up - it wouldn't be possible to create a decent environment with so many flats!' 'She just wanted to see the odd multi-storey block in New Towns, the way church spires used to rise, so you wouldn't have a sea of two-storey houses'. Dame Evelyn's personal attention to the centrally-planned New Towns and to authorities committed to design was mirrored by her relative lack of interest in the obsolete 'old towns', and relative lack of regard for the abilities and aspirations of some of their councillors. 30

The effect of this policy vacuum at the top was exacerbated by the fact that, unlike their Scottish and Northern Ireland counterparts, MHLG's Housing Administrators were seriously short-staffed throughout the 1950s and early '60s. Not only that, but many of these Administrators were by no means as unsympathetic to the local authorities as their Secretary. The resulting attitude was often to follow the line of least resistance, and simply let rip: 'If in doubt, let them get on with it! If that's what the locals want, and it's not unreasonable in cost - it's their town, after all!'. The cornerstone of MHLG's ramshackle administrative controls, its system of yearly allocations (applied except between 1954 and 1957), was itself 'always a fiction - you could make it up as you went along!' Nor was there any consistent provision, even in the case of high blocks, for any cost control other than value-for-money vetting at loan sanction stage. Even then, Administrators were often
quite happy to allow large local authorities an informal veto in individual cases. Furthermore, much routine decision-making was delegated to a fluctuating assortment of regional offices, except during the output slump around 1960: and, of course, regional offices 'always go native - they look after their own!' For instance, Edmonton MBC's Housing Chairman, Thomas Joyce, was able to pursue during the 1950s, at his own pace, an ambitious redevelopment programme, in the full knowledge that the Ministry's London regional office would always avoid any show-down: 'Tommy asked, "What now, Ted?" and he just replied, "I'm told by my officers you're building a multi-storey block on Fore Street, you're up to the second floor, and you haven't told us, and you're over your quota!". Tommy knew very well, but he turned to the Borough Architect and said, "Is that true?" The Regional Officer said, "Tommy, you old sod, you've done it again, haven't you!". But Tommy just replied, "I can't pull it down, can I!' 31 (III. 30)

If the involvement of MHLG Administrators was confined to a hesitant acquiescence in the spread of multi-storey flats, the influence of the Ministry's professional staff was even more peripheral, and, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, began to shade into an opposition role. The predicament of the architects and planners from the beginning was that their initiatives, although encouraged by Sharp as a counter to Administrators' and local authorities' output concerns, were purely advisory. In the case of design manuals, for instance, 'a synopsis is prepared by Architects and agreed with Admin; and in due course Architects produce a draft. Admin then think it won't do and try to reshape it'. It will be shown later that a clear line among Ministry architects concerning the new patterns was only to emerge around 1960, once the new, output-centred application of high flats had become clear: this would combine scepticism or opposition towards unrestrained multi-storey building, and encouragement of other types of 'high-density' development. 32

As proposed housing schemes were only formally vetted by MHLG Architects at loan sanction stage, only trivial alterations could, in practice, be requested at this point. The architects could secure more significant
Fore Street Redevelopment, Edmonton (subject of the dispute between Thomas Joyce and MHLG, related in Chapter 2): early 1960s view.
changes in initial informal discussions, although these were confined to multi-storey proposals, because of the latter's cost and complexity. Only in the case of smaller boroughs, however, were the architects able, through these informal consultations, to exert any detailed influence over architectural and contractual policy. In their initial appraisal of schemes, some Government architects praised high blocks, when employed in Gibberdian fashion as landmarks adjacent to open space. But this was offset by an increasing attempt to apply cost-based restraints to multi-storey building. The influence of MHLG planners over housing was more indirect: it was officially confined to cases of proposed zoning or Development Plan alterations, or appeals and public enquiries, where the occasional scheme could be blocked or modified.
'NO ONE WOULD DARE INTERFERE WITH THIS GREAT MACHINE PRODUCING HOUSES!' Government weakness and municipal strength in Scotland

The relative lack of influence of Government designers in Scotland in many ways simply echoed that of their Ministry counterparts in England and Wales. However, their status was, if anything, marginalised to an even greater extent by the resurgence of the central-local alliance in favour of high production and low rents. The highly urbanised character of Scotland, nearly 85% of whose inhabitants lived in towns, made possible much more immediate communication between DHS and the major authorities, and obviated any need for an allocations system. The political weakness of Unionist Ministers in the face of the larger municipalities only strengthened the longstanding consensus in favour of large-scale building between the Department's powerful Housing Administrators and local politicians and officials. So by the end of the 1950s it was becoming clear that DHS professional staff would be poorly placed to resist the most important potential challenge of all: any eventual attempt by Glasgow Corporation to break out of the 'land trap' set by the planners, through massed building of multi-storey flats. The designers, quite simply, lacked the necessary administrative and political power: 'No-one would dare interfere with this great machine producing houses!'  

The fear of marginalisation was beginning to haunt the Department's town and country planners, whose future in the field of housing policy had seemed so bright in the heady days of the 1940s. It will be shown in a later chapter that, once large-scale building of multi-storey blocks began in Glasgow in the early 1960s, the Department's planners increasingly turned to the possibility of outflanking the 'housers' at a strategic level, by constructing an overarching national structure of regional planning and development, or through a reorganisation of local government into a two-tier system which would subjugate the municipalities.
Such a vault into strategic speculation was not a course open to DHS architects, who were tied to the day-to-day appraisal of individual local housing proposals. In contrast to the generally laissez-faire attitude of their MHLG counterparts, the position of the Department's architects was a curious mixture of detailed control where it mattered little, in coordinating the schemes of the myriad small burghs, and impotence where it mattered most, in the task of applying central policies to the activity of Glasgow Corporation. Ever since the beginning of large-scale public housing construction in 1919, Glasgow had incessantly and vociferously questioned the need for Departmental vetting of individual schemes. Although some DHS architects were in favour of limited construction of 'landmark' point blocks, any turn by Glasgow to multi-storey 'site cramming' was altogether different. But by the end of the 1950s, with just such a policy change in prospect, the Department's Housing Administrators kept the architects firmly reined in, to avoid antagonising Jury and Glasgow's Housing Committee: they reminded the Architects that 'our relations with Glasgow Corporation generally, and Mr. Jury in particular, on the question of multi-storey flats, are highly delicate'. The DHS architects' influence was also undermined by their failure to establish cost guidelines for high flats, although Administrators had given them two chances to do so, including the formation in 1959 of a Joint Development Unit (based on the Ministry of Education's Development Group, and anticipating that of MHLG by a year). Inconclusive research was, however, the only result. 37

While DHS designers watched from the sidelines, Housing Administrators continued to pursue what they knew to be their primary task: that of facilitating local-authority housing production, within the limits imposed by the Treasury. In the Scottish context, large-scale flat-building seemed an obvious and hardly contentious way to achieve this aim. The change from building of tenements to building of multi-storey flats gave pause for thought: but acceptance was encouraged by the fact that some Administrators had visited, and admired, Roehampton and multi-storey developments on the Continent. 'We were all very impressed by the early Danish point-block schemes such as Bellahøj, landscaped with natural rocks and silver birch'. 38
However, even the Housing Administrators were taken aback when they realised that the open-ended generosity of the 1957 Act multi-storey subsidy was providing, in its own right, an 'undoubted attraction' to build high, even in improbable locations such as Perth. In response, tough temporary restrictions on multi-storey proposals were introduced. Then, in 1962, faced with urgent local pressure for increased multi-storey output, Administrators, after much argument, were able to persuade the Treasury to allow the 'cost-plus' subsidy to be replaced by an administratively much simpler flat-rate scheme: the restrictions on multi-storey schemes could then be largely removed. We will discuss the Central Government housing policies of those years in a later chapter.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 2

1 Int. Rendle.


4 'Heavy rate...': int. Beddoe.


7 1957-8 reductions concentrated on small authorities: Bedford MBC 19-3-1958.


10 MBSJC initiative on densities: LCC HC presented papers, Architect's report 26-5-1961 on Circular 37/60; LCC HC 15-6-60, papers on 14-2-1960 letter from MBSJC.


15 'Create the holes': int. Smythe.


18 Rent levels: DOE NI files 2271/60 (10-6-1960) and 3556/1959 (14-8-1958 table of comparative rents).


20 Modest reforms in Scotland: Circular 33/1960. Discouragement of Minister's enthusiasm for economic-rent flats: SRO DD6-1321, correspondence of January and February 1957. 'Warring barons': Int. former DHS architect. 'Glasgow Corporation was the power': Int. former Glasgow planner.


22 'The one thing the Government...': Int. Mabon.

23 'Fantastic' extra cost of high flats: Forshaw, JRIBA April 1955. 'Irrationality': Dunleavy, pp. 73-6.
24 Newcastle pressure for high-flat subsidy: Council 4-3-1953.
Birmingham alarm at redevelopment governing building: inter-committee conference 27-7-1953. MHLG's discretionary expensive site subsidy was most likely justified by reference to para 4(1) and First Schedule (b) of the H (Fin & Misc Provs) Act 1946, allowing inclusion of any items in calculation of the cost of a site - including presumably buildings erected on it. "They said, "Look, Minister'": int. Sheppard Fidler.


27 Suppression of 3-storey flats: Camberwell MBC Building Development Committee 2-7-1955; Stoke Newington MBC HC 5-12-1955; LCC HC 23-11-1955, report of 16-11-1955 by Comptroller. Expensive sites subsidy weighted against schemes of 3 or fewer storeys: St Marylebone MBC 10-10-62. Possible encouragement of high flats: Chelmsford MBC HC 9-7-1959. Melbourne Estate: 15 storey rather than 10 storey chosen. Alleged conspiracy to reduce costs: Dunleavy, p.164; Merrett; Administrators aware of municipal enthusiasm to use high flats to maintain output, HLG 101-748; Purdew AJ 15-1-1959; SRO DD6-2133 3-10-1959 MHLG Principal to HS Housing Assistant Secretary. Discussion of 'high versus low' economics without subsidy variable (with piling and lift costs leading to a 15 storey and 3 storey combination): States of Jersey Housing Committee report on Samarès Marsh proposal, Jersey Evening Post 24-5-1971 p.1.

28 Cheaper tenements than cottages in Scotland: Steele, JRIBA April 1955 p. 261; but see Strathclyde Regional Archive D-TC 8/20 multi-storey file, Bradbury-Town Clerk 5-10-1945 MS file, for DHS encouragement of Glasgow prototype.


30 Brooke enthusiasm to 'identify himself' with slum-clearance: HLG 102-366 EAS-SWCP 17-12-1955. 'She just wanted to see...': int. Milefanti.


32 'Synopsis': HLG 101-816, EAS-Forshaw 21-8-1957.

33 Trivial alterations: SRO DD6/1321 4-3-1957 report on meeting at MHLG; Tipton MBC HC 13-4-1559 (Churchyard Road). Ministry influence over smaller authorities: Chatham MBC HC 5-6-1961 (Ordnance Street), HC 3-9-1962 (on loan of LCC 'scissors' plans), HC 2-9-1963 (Melville Barracks). But see Rugby MBC HC 5-7-1966 for rebuff of Regional Architect's suggestions for layout alterations. MHLG architects' Gibberdian ideas: Hull CBC Housing Subcommittee 31-10-1958 (Bilton Grange).

34 Planners turning down scheme: see for instance Whitstable UDC Public Health and Housing Committee 27-11-1964, 11-6-1965. Their behind-scenes pressure, along with architects, able to kill off local schemes in favour of national firms: (Ellor Street, Salford) HLG 131-19 on influence of Wilkinson, Senior Planning Officer, and 8-12-1960 Cleeve Barr note commenting on 'architecturally unpleasant' McWilliam slabs, (Portsdown Hill, Portsmouth) Evening News 5-10-1963, p. 1.

35 Int. former Glasgow/SDD senior planner.


38 Bellahej: int. Cramond. Administrators knew P. A. Stone's anti-
municipal theories on the economics of high building: SRO DD6-1321,
cutting from Economist 9-3-1959.

39 Introduction of high-flat subsidy: SRO DD6/929, 930, 931.
Encouragement or discouragement of high building: int. Fleming, Fraser;
SRO DD5-2169 14-1-1959 meeting; SRO DD6-1565 13-2-1957 note; SRO DD6-
2331 26-11-1957 note; SRO DD6-2133 note of 18-8-1959, 25-8-1959 table
comparing Moat Drive 10 storey subsidy with comparable MHLG subsidy, and
8-5-1967 comparison of English and Scottish subsidies; HD 454/57,
470/59. Aberdeen row with DHS over cut in 'amenity' high flats at
Hazlehead from 56% to 33% of scheme: City of Aberdeen Planning
Department files, letter DHS-Corporation 13-4-1960.
CHAPTER 3: QUANTITY OR 'QUALITY'? : DEFEAT OF THE DESIGNERS

In the previous chapters, it was demonstrated that Central Government had helped to set a 'land trap' for British cities in the 1940s and 1950s. However, municipal power unexpectedly discovered a way in which the initiative could be recovered, and Central Government forces relegated to an ancillary or oppositional role. The cities found, and ruthlessly exploited, a short-cut through their difficulties of land assembly: 'site cramming' with high blocks. In the process, the municipal 'producers' broke the monopoly over use of Modern flats previously taken for granted by LCC and other architects, and there began a struggle between 'designers' and 'producers' for control of the direction of Modern housing provision.

During the early 1960s, this battle of the giants came to a head, inside and outside the Government: both factions attempted to exploit the suddenly more favourable economic context to reinforce their claims. The advocates of design claimed that increasing affluence made it imperative to raise the 'quality' of housing. On the other hand, the housing 'crusaders' of the great cities grew ever more vociferous in demanding Government support for higher and higher rates of building - particularly in the form of multi-storey blocks. But what substance could there possibly have been in such a quarrel, between 'quantity' and 'quality'? Surely, by about 1960, there was a wide degree of consensus among all 'providers' that Modern housing could provide both. In reality, however, this superficial consensus concealed a yawning gulf in understanding. The ideals of 'quality' and 'good design' so eloquently advocated in architects' and Ministers' public pronouncements were largely drawn from the 'standards' of Modern Dwelling design propagated in the early postwar years by architects and other 'design professions'. But most municipal 'housing crusaders' acknowledged only a rather more basic selection of 'standards', such as floor-space, sunlight and daylight, and kitchen/bathroom provision, which were mostly also applicable to the previous generation of municipal flats: indeed, the late 1950s Scottish space standards for flats (which, as we will see, virtually equalled those of that standard-bearer of Modern dwelling
'standards', the Parker Morris Report, were at first largely applied to the massed building of tenements at Easterhouse. To councillors and officials determined on higher output, whether of Modern flats or tenements, insistence on anything more than these established 'standards' certainly seemed frivolous, and even raised a question-mark over the motives of its authors. Thus 'good design', which to Modern designers in the LCC mould was a mostly factual and uncontentious matter, could end up by appearing, to others, nothing other than a rhetorical device, a weapon to advance the power of one particular group.

In some cases, such as that of Glasgow (to be discussed in Chapter 6), the result was to be bitter conflict. Across the whole country, however, the opposition of design to production was to be bypassed in a generally less confrontational way. As economic pressure eased, political pressure inexorably mounted for a revival in 'national' housing output - a tendency which could only increase Ministers' dependence on the active municipalities. As a result, the hidden agenda of British Government housing policy throughout the early and mid 1960s became a simple continuation of the line of least resistance towards production pressures. This, in its turn, would further reinforce the power of the municipal 'housing crusaders', thus facilitating the rapid spread of multi-storey building across the remainder of urban Britain.

What, then, was the general context, during the early 1960s, in which this conflict between design and production flared up? This period was characterised by a combination of optimism and satisfaction concerning the prospects of the economy and the existing achievements of the housing programme, and worries concerning a whole range of new perceived problems. Within the Government, the optimism among Ministers and Administrators was caused by an expectation of economic and population growth following the financial problems of the late '50s - although this was jolted by a brief hiccup, in the form of the 1961 economic 'squeeze'. This confidence was reflected among many of the professional groups concerned with housing. Within MHLG, there was a sense that the back of the slum-clearance problem had been broken in England and Wales,
leaving only local pockets of unfitness and housing shortage which would be easy to remedy. 1

But these apparent successes also highlighted new areas of political controversy and vulnerability. Across the whole of urban Britain, any recovery from the decline in completions since the late '50s faced a range of organisational and financial hurdles: principally, land constraints, high interest rates and the slowness of slum-clearance. In Scotland, this only exacerbated the Government's longstanding weakness in relation to the powerful Labour authorities, with their incessant demands for continued general-needs output and low rents. In England, by contrast, it was the very success of slum-clearance which diverted the attention of many county boroughs once more towards their lengthening general waiting lists. The rising clamour across Britain for higher output found party-political expression in the competitive emphasis* which was increasingly given to national housing 'targets'. The most dramatic landmark in this process was the declaration of a 400,000 target at the 1963 Conservative Party conference by the new Minister of Housing and Local Government, Sir Keith Joseph. In the South-East of England, the Government also found itself under attack on a range of new issues,* which were mostly related to the effects of the economic boom and of the decontrol of private rents in Brooke's 1957 Rent Act. These new controversies included the 'homelessness problem', first seriously whipped up in 1960-1 by the LCC as a political gambit to embarrass the Government; the rise in land costs; the threat of mass evictions following the falling-in of leases or ownership transfers; and the millstone of 'Rachmanism', a persistent scandal concerning landlord harassment which 'although in fact a product of rent control, was perceived as a product of rent decontrol'. 2

In the late 1950s, Government designers first began to formulate a concerted response to the municipal exploitation of high blocks for output purposes. During the early 'sixties, these architects and planners then sought to capitalise on the new political climate of housing through initiatives which stressed the ideal of 'quality' in housing; in Scotland, grandiose developments of the idea of regional
planning were more prominent. But the most energetic attempt by designers to seize back control of Modern housing was concerned with the building process itself: the push for architect-controlled 'open systems' of prefabrication.
FLATS AND HOUSES 1958: THE MINISTRY ARCHITECTS REGROUP

It was the initiative of the municipal 'housing crusaders' in adopting Modern flats for their own purposes, which in turn sparked off the growth of an opposition grouping, within central as well as local government. MHLG's architects, in a loose alliance with their LCC counterparts, saw themselves as constituting a front line in this defence of design interests. But whereas the LCC's architects had relied on sophisticated visual-social argumentation to maintain control over the Council's housing programme, those at the Ministry attempted to enlist the principles of cost control into the service of design.

The MHLG architects set out to exploit the disparity between the high cost of multi-storey blocks and the cheapness of England's 'traditional', lightly-constructed brick cottages. This argument had first been worked out between 1956 and 1958 by A.A. Bellamy, a Principal Architect who enjoyed a close relationship with Administrators; and it was incorporated in a manual, Flats and Houses 1958, which Bellamy wrote along with S.W. Gilbert, a Housing Principal. Flats and Houses argued, broadly, that the largest possible proportion of four-storey maisonettes should be built, in mixed developments, while the proportion of high blocks should be correspondingly reduced. Bellamy's cost-shaped view of the correct use of multi-storey blocks had moved beyond the position of the LCC architects, who still assumed that high flats could, and should, be freely used at the designer's discretion. Bellamy was particularly critical of LCC assumptions that the economics of mixed development revolved around a cost equation between high flats and cottages, which, he felt, might lead to a simplistic conclusion that 'the height of tall blocks should be increased to allow for more houses'. He held, instead, that advantage should now be taken of the economy of four-storey construction - in the form not of block dwellings, but, of course, of Modern flats and maisonettes. These cost-based arguments so alarmed Sheppard Fidler, in his capacity as chairman of the joint MHLG-local authority Technical Advisory Panel, that he wrote to Bellamy, warning him against 'creating a prejudice against high buildings as such': this, Fidler feared, might impede designers' freedom.
But the MHLG architects' drift away from high flats was soon reinforced, when, in 1960, A.W. Cleeve Barr was appointed as Chief Architect: his arrival was followed by that of other ex-LCC architects, such as Oliver Cox, Colin Jones and Beeban Morris. Barr lost no time in founding a Development Group, on architect-sociologist Ministry of Education lines, and setting the Group to work on a variety of schemes for cottages and low flats; the most significant of these was the 'Family Houses I' scheme at Ravenscroft Road, West Ham. (Ill. 31) Dame Evelyn Sharp had also hoped that Barr would bring in tight, designer-supervised cost controls on the model of those established for some time in school-building. Accordingly, he and Bellamy rapidly worked up the 'cash basis' for minimising high flats and encouraging medium-height Modern flats and maisonettes (as set out in Flats and Houses), into a fully-fledged set of guidelines; these were published in 1963 as a Design Bulletin, containing tables of advisory 'cost yardsticks'.

The centralised school-building programme had always very much been under the thumb of Ministry and county architects and other professional groups. In stark contrast, the housing drive was of such urgency that the Government and LCC architects were never likely to be able to exert any real influence over the nationwide spread of the new Modern patterns. From the start, the omens were not good for any centrally-directed initiative aimed at fighting the general dilution of mixed development principles by 'production' concerns, and, in particular, the adaptation of the multi-storey block as a weapon of 'site cramming'.

Within MHLG, the sheer scale of public housebuilding soon caused architectural policy on Modern flats to become fatally fragmented. Even within the central grouping of Whitehall architects, none remotely in favour of massed building of high flats, there was a potential division between those who, with Bellamy, singled out their great cost for attack, and those who questioned them chiefly on socio-architectural grounds. The second group were apt to look on the first as 'Treasury fifth-columnists', although the chasm between the cost-control advocates and the designers was only to become unbridgeable later in the 1960s. Then there were the divisions between the regions and Whitehall, and
'Family Houses I' scheme, Ravenscroft Road, West Ham; designed by MHLG Development Group. 1989 view.
between the academics and the coalface-workers. On the one side, there stood the Development Group, its activities confined to a quasi-academic vacuum, and acting almost as if high flats did not exist. On the other side, the regional or territorial architects battled with mountains of day-to-day case-files, valiantly trying to apply Bellamy's guidelines, on an ad-hoc basis, to the multi-storey or mixed development proposals with which they were faced. Over the late 1950s and early 1960s, these architects attempted, with some backing from Administrators, to introduce further cost-based restraints thought up by Bellamy's staff. These included a cut in the proportion of high blocks, elimination of supposedly uneconomic types such as 3, 5 or 6-storey flats, and spreading of the cost of lifts among a larger number of flats on each floor. But success was halting, and always depended on support from Administrators. In 1959, for instance, the latter permitted Chelmsford MBC's Borough Engineer to force through a proposal for a 15-storey point block on a suburban estate, despite pressure by the Ministry's architects for a 10-storey alternative based on the 'Flats and Houses' cost tables. Even the 1963 advisory cost yardstick did not in practice discourage gap-site development with individual point-blocks, as it allowed for very high notional site densities at local authorities' discretion. However, the early 1960s saw the tentative beginnings of the pincer arguments, dependent on definitions of density, which were to be used by MHLG architects later in the decade to suppress multi-storey building in many parts of England. These claimed, on the one hand, that multi-storey building was only appropriate at certain minimum densities, and, on the other hand, that development above certain densities was uneconomic or otherwise undesirable.

The official use of 'density' as a restrictive weapon only consistently exerted any inhibiting effect in the case of suburban developments. Even here, there was no consistency: arguments and definitions often fluctuated in an extraordinary way. For instance, in 1962, the Housing Committee of the Middlesex borough of Southall decided to develop the town's last major piece of virgin housing land, the Golf Links site, with a scheme including high blocks. Immediately, however, the borough found itself caught between the competing density stipulations of two
official groupings, both set on curbing 'site cramming' with high flats. On the one hand, Middlesex County Council’s Area Planning Officer flatly demanded that this development must not exceed 60 h.r.p.a.; on the other, MHLG Regional Architects and Administrators would only countenance high flats if the 'site density overall' was at a level of 100 h.r.p.a. or more, which they regarded as the minimum 'appropriate' level for multi-storey building. Eventually, after seven months' haggling over which definition of density should be applied, both bodies agreed to Southall's erection of two point blocks, so long as development was restricted, for the time being, to two-thirds of the originally proposed site: this would satisfy MHLG with a site density of 98 h.r.p.a., and Middlesex with a 60 h.r.p.a. density for the notional entire scheme. Southall also had to promise MHLG that (in negotiations with Middlesex) they would not renounce the right to develop the remaining third of the original site: for, the Ministry speculated, zoned densities might at some future date be raised. If even the relatively modest output demands of suburban Southall were significantly affected by the competing restrictions of different density bureaucracies, it is all too easy to imagine the gulf in thinking which separated the elaborate tables of densities and layouts in Flats and Houses 1958, from the production concerns of men such as Bradbury in Liverpool!
PARKER MORRIS AND URBAN RENEWAL

While the Ministry's architects continued to press administrative procedures of cost control into the service of design, the public debate about the internal and external planning of housing was meanwhile reinforced by two major official initiatives of the early 'sixties in England and Wales. The focus of discussion concerning the dwelling itself was the 1961 'Parker Morris' Report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*. This document was issued by a subcommittee of the CHAC - the body which brought together, under a general Government aegis, representatives of all the most 'enlightened' housing-Establishment bodies, to discuss and draw up advisory policy initiatives. As the 1960s progressed, the CHAC, under the influence of reformistadministrator-academics such as Donnison and Cullingworth, began to visualise its studies and reports in an increasingly grandiose light, as building-blocks which would contribute to the eventual construction of a 'comprehensive' national housing policy. The Parker Morris Report should be seen in the context of this slightly messianic climate of opinion within the official and academic housing mandarinate in the 'sixties - a generosity of speculation and ambition which, we will see later, was also reflected in the field of town and country planning. Parker Morris, it was hoped, would provide the building block labelled 'dwelling design'. In all such initiatives, rigorous control by forward-looking professional groups was the first and foremost requirement: accordingly, Parker Morris emphatically called for control of design by architects, and for detailed sociological analysis of dwelling use. The main concrete recommendations, however, were that numerous new and potentially costly provisions of additional space, heating and fittings should be introduced. The Committee's advocacy of lavish amenities was partly motivated by its members' 'apprehension' about the large-scale building of flats, which they assumed could never be more than an 'expedient' in comparison with the traditional English cottage, 'which has personal qualities and allows for individualism'. The deprived dwellers of flats would, it was thought, require compensation, in the form of domestic gadgetry and architect design.
The second official-reformist initiative, under the broad heading of 'Urban Renewal', was concerned with the wider setting of housing in the town: it tried to transcend 'mere' slum clearance, by discussing housing in the context of the mounting pressure for central-area commercial redevelopment. 'Urban Renewal' resulted from a combination of several influences. Most prominent among these were: a growing Ministerial unease about overspill and desire for private-sector involvement in redevelopment; opposition among MHLG planners to piecemeal private or public redevelopment; agitation by the architectural pressure-group SPUR for higher-density 'urbanity'; and pressure from Coventry's City Architect, Arthur Ling, that redevelopment and overspill subsidies should be extended to cover schemes outside narrowly-defined slum areas, and should also apply to private developers. These initiatives evolved into an officially-blessed campaign for joint public/private redevelopment and improvement of decayed, but not unfit districts, dubbed 'twilight areas'. As presented in the public pronouncements of Ministers and other Central Government sources, Urban Renewal combined advocacy of more sophisticated redevelopment with an attempt to curb the use of high flats as a means simply of 'site cramming', or as a municipal 'status symbol'.

But neither Parker Morris nor Urban Renewal offered any immediate help to Ministers in tackling the most pressing aspect of the 'housing problem': the continuing slump in output. This fact was easily appreciated by the new Minister of Housing (from 1962), Sir Keith Joseph. He was initially instructed by Macmillan to use 'urban renewal' as the vehicle of a joint central Government-private enterprise housing drive, which would partly harness and partly bypass local authorities, and which might create 'New Towns within old towns'. Joseph was passionately committed to urban renewal, at both a practical and theoretical level; and, to that end, he commissioned from Taylor Woodrow the 'Fulham Study' (1964), directed by the architect Theo Crosby, which explored the issues of London twilight-area redevelopment at densities well above current LCC maxima.
But Joseph was also a skilful politician, and he rapidly became aware of the practical impossibility of turning round overnight the economic and political consequences of half a century of rent control: any intervention might initially create transitional dislocations which the Labour Party could exploit, as in the case of 'Rachmanism'. The chief economic obstacle was the fact that 'the sleazy areas where the need for renewal was greatest did not attract private enterprise', especially if incomers were to subsidise displaces' rents. Politically, therefore, Urban Renewal in its initial form seemed a non-starter: 'I dreamt of going to firms like the Prudential and saying, "Under what conditions would you return to investing in housing?". They'd've said, "It's easy - just give us a public undertaking by the Labour Party that they won't cancel it!" - the one thing we couldn't deliver!' 11

Joseph was also conscious that any attempt to impose Parker Morris standards, however sophisticated the analysis of dwelling use they embodied, would be resented in many town halls, Labour and Conservative, as a wasteful and invidious intervention. And the precedent of the 1919 Addison Acts showed that, by driving up prices, any precipitate introduction of Parker Morris might easily exacerbate the existing housing shortage! So political realism demanded that Joseph should act in an opposite direction to his public pronouncements; he should work with those 'principalities', the large cities, channelling additional expenditure and output into their own programmes, which would inevitably involve ploughing still higher subsidies into construction of multi-storey blocks, whose unrestrained production had been officially condemned ever since the publication of Flats and Houses 1958. All the same, Joseph still tentatively put forward his designers' view of high-flat building in his local tours, passing on their Diminishing Returns argumentation: 'I'd roll up a piece of paper, stand it on the table and I'd say, "This is what you want to do - build a high block - but when you've allowed for planning, sunlighting and so on, why don't you do this?" - and I'd lay it out horizontally!' But for the purposes of this account, actions were more important than words: here, given that the large cities were determined to build high flats, Joseph felt compelled to stand aside. 12
Therefore urban renewal was put on the back burner, with the intention that it should be pursued by means of improvement rather than redevelopment in several years' time, once the new housing drive was much further advanced; and Parker Morris standards were, for the time being, kept advisory. By 1964, only 14% of new council dwellings under construction in England and Wales incorporated the full standards, and only 39% the space standards. Even the subsequent voluntary adoption of the full or partial Parker Morris standards by many municipalities, enabling MHLG to make them mandatory for new council housing in 1969, may have owed something to large authorities' desire to build high blocks: in some places, it seems that Parker Morris was used purely and simply as a cloak for the extra cost of continued large-scale multi-storey construction, at a time when building prices were generally inflated. 13

That Parker Morris would, in practice, often add up to little more than a potential excuse for more multi-storey building, for those seeking such an excuse, was certainly the conclusion reached by one group of outside observers - the Housing Administrators of the Department of Health for Scotland. DHS of course stood at one remove from the debates south of the border. The key Parker Morris space standards were already equalled in Scotland, and many councillors and officials regarded the chief thrust of the Report - its attempt to carry discussion beyond these standards into areas such as do-it-yourself domestic self-expression, hobby spaces, power points and so forth - as being an absurd irrelevance in the context of the starkly simple housing preoccupations of Scotland: high output, low rents and overcrowded slums. Private enterprise-based Urban Renewal also seemed a non-starter in Scotland. DHS had long come to accept that it would be impossible to stimulate private building on any scale, in view of the scarcity of building land, and the reluctance of the relatively few and monopolistic private developers to 'build down to the market'. 14

Instead, the main focus of activity and innovation for those within the Scottish Office who hoped to break the municipal grip on housing policy was the wider field of regional planning. Here, as in the case of
Northern Ireland, the 1960s rhetoric of economic and physical modernisation would find expression in the establishment of a Government department concerned with every aspect of physical development. Following the 1961 Toothill Report on national economic planning, the Scottish Development Department was established in 1962, taking over the development functions of the Department of Health for Scotland (including housing and planning) and the Scottish Home Department. SDD's first Secretary, Sir Douglas Haddow, and senior planners such as Robert Grieve, nursed heady aspirations to reconstruct Central Scotland by redistributing population away from the obsolete old towns towards new 'growth centres'. This was really a kind of re-packaging of overspill, elevating it to an exalted level far above mere slum-clearance decanting. But, as we will see, during these years of airy planning rhetoric, the output requirements of the large Scottish housebuilding authorities, although less in the public eye, were destined to remain well safeguarded by Ministers and Housing Administrators.
BUILDING BY DESIGN?

'Today, architects are part of the building industry.' A. W. Cleeve Barr

It will be seen in Chapter 5 that the great early-1960s drive for numbers was to coincide with severe building-industry shortages, caused by a vigorous private-sector boom; and it will be argued that this sudden and unexpected obstacle was surmounted by innovative policies on the part of local-authorities and contractors - above all the adoption of negotiated or 'package-deal' contracts, and elements of prefabricated construction. But the political and organisational side of the building process is of interest to us for another reason: because it came to constitute one of the key battlefields between production and design during those years. At the same time as local authorities and the building industry were trying to expand output of high flats and Modern housing despite building shortages, the public-architectural establishment was mounting its most concerted attempt to recapture control of the Modern housing programme. But eventually, as will be shown in the following pages, this would become the scene of the designers' most resounding defeat.

On the face of it, prefabricated building of council housing seemed a uniquely apt potential point of convergence for the two main streams of British Modern architectural theory - the social-moral, and the rational-scientific. Yet this subject had not, during the 1950s, excited significant interest among design-orientated public architects. These 'social-reforming artist-scientists' instead preferred to cruise regally around in the small ornamental pond of the schools programme. However, between the years 1961-5, this situation changed, and a fierce controversy flared along roughly 'design versus production' lines. This dispute concerned the implications for housing production, and control of the building process, of new construction techniques, loosely termed 'system' or 'industrialised' building. Threatened with a loss of control over the new patterns and structural techniques which they had
pioneered in the 1950s, the designers counterattacked vigorously, asserting leadership of the Modern building process: 'Bring in the architect at the production stage'... 'today, architects are part of the building industry', proclaimed Cleeve Barr.

From the very start, this architect-led campaign portrayed its main target, production-led building, as the result not of local political demands, but of commercial or industrial pressure. A strong contrast was drawn between the bogeyman of 'closed systems' (proprietary construction methods, dismissed as mere vehicles for contractual control) and the ideal of 'open systems' (mass-production of components suitable for use in individually architect-designed schemes). The campaign for this architect-led 'open system' building in the early 1960s was centred around two parallel initiatives. The first began within the LCC, whose programme was always exceptional in its domination by design-minded architects and aversion to output for its own sake. The second originated in 1960, and spread outwards from MHLG's Development Group (overseen by ex-LCC men such as Cleeve Barr and Oliver Cox) to inspire various architect-dominated local 'consortia'.
PREFABRICATION AND THE LCC

Although the nationwide Modern building drive was concentrated in the 1960s, the LCC's involvement with prefabrication had begun in the early 'fifties. It formed part of the 'R & D' programme by which the Architect's Department exerted nationwide influence over experimentation in the structural design of housing. Throughout the 1950s the Department, in conformity with its self-appointed role as national trendsetter, had kept up an intermittent stream of structural experiments into precast construction of high blocks, in collaboration with Wates and, later, Reema. The Department's first full-scale multi-storey 'development project', Cleeve Barr's Picton Street scheme, was negotiated in 1955 (with Laing) - not for output reasons but because 'we'd put in everything we could think of, and a negotiated tender was the only way to price it!' In all these cases, the starting-point was the architect's design: to this the structural innovations and contractors' contributions were tailored.

The general opposition of the LCC (and its successor the GLC) to 'mere' output will be discussed in Chapter 8. Here, we are concerned specifically with the Council's attitude towards contractual and organisational innovation. The hostility of LCC architects and councillors towards the 'numbers game' exerted a particularly strong influence in 1961, when the Housing Committee was discussing how to overcome an output slump and shortage of architectural staff. Having been in the forefront of constructional experimentation in the 1950s, the LCC now moved to identify itself with the most conservative viewpoint in contractual matters. The Architect's Department, with the full support of the Committee, flatly vetoed any significant move to build 'package deal' schemes designed by contractors: this was justified on the grounds that the Committee's sites 'normally necessitate tailor-made schemes to achieve required densities, proportions of dwellings, different sizes etc'. And the one tiny package-deal experiment subsequently authorised by the Council - for two seven-storey Bison blocks in Wandsworth, containing a total of 56 dwellings - was so
complicated by the tinkering of the GLC's architects that the latter were eventually able triumphantly to pronounce it a failure. 19

Rather than use package-deals to alleviate the professional staff shortage, the LCC chose to employ private practices, and, in the building field, to dabble with a range of strictly constrained prefabricated supplements to existing output. The two most successful of these experiments were, firstly, the Mobile Homes programme, under which timber bungalows were mass-produced by Calders (Northern) for temporary vacant sites, and, secondly, a joint project with Taylor Woodrow-Anglian Ltd. to build blocks in precast Larsen-Nielsen construction, designed by Martin Richardson in collaboration with the contractors. These 'MW' blocks, mostly of 10 storeys, were erected initially at the Morris Walk Areas and Site, Woolwich, from 1963, and subsequently at several repeat sites. 20 (Ill. 32)

Even in this latter case, however, it was made abundantly clear that output would not be permitted to displace design as the Council's main concern. Taylor Woodrow-Anglian had initially been attracted by the size of the LCC, which had regularly awarded huge 'cost-plus' contracts (a kind of risk-free rolling negotiated contract) for out-county cottage estates during the 1950s. But the size of the Larsen-Nielsen contract was deliberately held by the Housing Committee 'well below its highest capacity to repeat' so as merely to 'narrow the gap [between targets and actual output] while maintaining a high standard of architectural merit'. The Architect's Department had originally been drawn to Larsen-Nielsen by its association with high-quality finish (particularly at Arne Jacobsen's St. Catherine's College, Oxford); and Richardson was able to exert considerable influence over the design of the blocks. However, he soon became disillusioned with the formal discipline imposed by the two-flat 'day production unit': 'It [the block shape] didn't express the house, but the production unit, which had no social meaning and therefore no visual meaning'. 21

At the same time, full rein was still given to the Department's wilder elements, elsewhere in the programme. By 1961, the 'concrete madmen' of
LCC Morris Walk development (built from 1963 by Taylor Woodrow-Anglian); 1989 view, showing type 'MW' 10-storey blocks.
Colin Lucas's group (which had been responsible for the 'hard' or Corbusian part of the Roehampton development) were now busy designing new and heavily modelled point block types for 'traditional' in-situ construction: these were first built, along with new maisonette types, at the Brandrams Works development (Canada Estate), Bermondsey. (Ill. 33) And, also in 1961, there commenced, with the enthusiastic endorsement of Denington and Campbell, a project which was far more spectacular in structural terms: the steel-framed, plastic-clad 'S.F.1' point block, designed by John Davidson's group. But subsequently, this most exotic product of the LCC design hothouse turned out to be yet another expensive 'one off', for reasons largely outside the Department's control; the scheme was eventually terminated by the GLC after only four blocks had been built, at Walterton Road and Watney Street Market. (Ills. 34-36)
33  LCC Brandram's Works Site, Bermondsey (1962 onwards; block types designed by Colin Lucas's group); 1989 view.
Walterton Road/Rodborough Mews Site development, Paddington, designed by the LCC and built from 1965 by the GLC; seen in 1989.
Walterton Road, detail of 'SFI' (Indulex) steel-frame plastic-clad 22-storey point block.
Walterton Road, detail of 'SF1' steel-frame plastic-clad 22-storey point block.
From its inception in 1960, the MHLG Housing Development Group had been envisaged by Cleeve Barr, Oliver Cox, and sympathetic Administrators such as R.O.C. Winkler, as a vehicle for the principle of architect-controlled 'open systems'. It was hoped that the Group's emphasis on two-storey blocks, modular design flexibility and integrated sociological research would counter the advance of contractor-controlled 'closed systems' for high blocks. These the Group's architects denounced on grounds of their supposed social and visual crudity. Cox demanded that 'external appearance should not be sacrificed on the altar of economy as it has been on all these systems to date'. As the Group's explicit aim was to emulate their Ministry of Education counterparts, the obvious first step, in an initial project for old people's housing at Stevenage, was to import the CLASP method of school-prefabrication. CLASP was later modified by Pat Tindale into the '5M' series of purpose-designed cottage-types.

By the time of an important national conference staged by the Cement and Concrete Association ('Housing from the Factory') in October 1962, the discrepancy between the designers' aspirations and the reality of housing production had become only too clear. In his introductory paper, Cleeve Barr dismissed contractor-controlled prefabrication as a short-term expedient en route to a Golden Age of architect-designed 2-storey houses built from standardised components, and Kenneth Campbell grandly asserted that 'as far as the architect is concerned, he is concerned with the whole of the process we have been discussing today and, in fact, even more'. But Sir Keith Joseph jocularly noted in his opening address that 'although this is called, as a Conference, "Housing from the Factory", I suspect from looking at the agenda that a great deal of it will be flats from the factory'. As explained in 1963 by Neil Wates, the contractual and local political perspective on the potential of prefabrication was altogether different from that of the LCC and MHLG architects: 'System building would have the greatest impact on the output of buildings in high blocks, and [besides] low labour
consuming methods in high building would make more labour available to speed up the building of 2 and 3 storey dwellings'.

From that point onwards, MHLG Architects began to pour out a barrage of initiatives, which they hoped would somehow relax the hold of 'closed' systems and multi-storey blocks. The Development Group had already, in 1962, persuaded Oldham CBC in principle to allow it to build a 500-dwelling follow-up to Family Houses I, using large-panel prefabrication, in the dilapidated St. Mary's area of the town - although some confusion derived from the fact that the Group omitted to inform MHLG's Northern Regional Office, located only ten miles away in Manchester! Seemingly inexorably, the Oldham project found itself drawn into the orbit of Laing, a high-quality but 'extremely tough' firm whose sales pitch, for nearly thirty years, had emphasised involvement in architecturally noteworthy schemes and sponsorship of competitions. Initially it was agreed that MHLG and Laing would jointly develop a modification of the Danish Jespersen 'system' (chosen by the Ministry architects as, supposedly, the only 'modular' large-panel construction), that Laing would build the Oldham prototype and that the jointly-developed 12M Jespersen would then be declared an 'open system' for anyone to use. However, as will be explained later, events were to turn out very differently: eventually the Ministry would find itself promoting 12M Jespersen on Laing's behalf, as a 'closed system'. In Scotland, the Joint Development Unit of DHS and SSHA echoed their MHLG counterparts' aims; here the 'bogeyman' was Glasgow Corporation, increasingly fascinated with package-deals. Yet despite the efforts of Harold Buteux, SSHA's Chief Technical Officer from 1959 and a zealous proponent of architect-controlled prefabrication, the Association was eventually obliged to place contracts for prefabricated high blocks, from 1963, with Concrete Ltd (Bison) and Gilbert Ash.

But central Government architects could not be everywhere at once: their campaign, to gain nationwide influence, would have to develop local offshoots. One possible way of achieving this was to intervene in important projects, to ensure that they were assigned to sympathetic architects of national status, rather than local officials. This was
first attempted by MHLG in the case of Salford, in Lancashire. Salford's programme was dominated by its formidable City Engineer, G. Alexander McWilliam, and by its equally entrenched direct labour organisation. In 1961, Cleeve Barr, acting in concert with J.T. Wilkinson, a Senior Planning Officer, successfully set out to dislodge McWilliam from the city's central redevelopment scheme - although three 15-storey slab blocks to the design of the latter's Chief Architectural Assistant, J.H. Earle, had already been commenced. McWilliam had 'set his heart' on carrying through this vast redevelopment in his Department, through the direct-labour building (in collaboration with Truscon) of large numbers of these now somewhat old-fashioned blocks, to secure maximum output. In language reminiscent of J.M. Richards's 1949 attacks on the LCC Valuer's housing (prior to the transfer of housing design back to the LCC Architect), Barr lambasted the City Engineer's outline scheme: 'The architectural arrangement of most of the blocks of housing appears to be accidental and based mainly on a theoretical north-south axis. The spaces around buildings would be architecturally unpleasant and the views of buildings seen from walking along the proposed roads would be haphazard in the extreme'.

Eventually, Salford grudgingly yielded, and agreed to the appointment of Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall as architect-planners for the entire scheme, and the Edinburgh University Architectural Research Unit (ARU) as executive architects for its initial portion: the Ellor Street redevelopment. Percy Johnson-Marshall's brief for this latter section comprised five 17-storey point blocks, and the ARU were given strict instructions to use prefabricated construction. The Unit, dominated by young architects opposed to multi-storey blocks, found the architectural brief disagreeable, and, on examination of some existing 'systems' (Camus, Taylor Woodrow-Anglian, Coignet), came to the conclusion that none offered sufficient design flexibility: so it was decided that 'we would have to do our own system!' But although an enthusiastic local precasting company, Fram, were appointed structural subcontractors, the Corporation insisted on use of its own DLO as main contractor. Saddled with this 'albatross', the project's construction was severely delayed. At the same time, Johnson-Marshall's overall plan, envisaging a complex,
multi-level 'regional centre', had run into fatal organisational and constructional difficulties.

Rapidly, it was becoming clear that any local offshoots of architect-controlled prefabrication could not be imposed on the municipal structure, but would have to grow from within it. Here the architect's task seemed to be to work within the system rather than trying to bypass it. In this context first arose the idea of consortia: regional groups of urban authorities, each (the architects hoped) to be directed by its own CLASP-like development group. The economic pretext of consortia was the creation of 'big packages of demand', but their underlying intention was to spread across the country the architectural control of the building of Modern housing. This aim was evident in the policies of the three most important early consortia: the Yorkshire Development Group (YDG: first and most ambitious), the Scottish Local Authorities Housing Group (SLASH), and the Midlands Housing Consortium (MHC).

It will be seen in a later chapter that SLASH (formed in 1963) was originally a political initiative of Glasgow's Housing Committee leader, David Gibson, who hoped to circumvent high costs and shortages through bulk-buying of materials; but that it was soon taken over and redirected by SDD and SSHA architects. YDG (formed in 1961), which initially comprised Leeds, Sheffield and Hull, partly arose out of pressure from Karl Cohen for higher output; but it immediately came under the effective control of a panel of City Architects, who concentrated on the design of prefabricated dwellings of low or medium height. At first, in 1962, a range of existing cottage types, such as 5M, or the local Hallamshire and Caspon, was adapted for YDG use. Later, at the instigation of the Group's Development Architect, Martin Richardson (who was unhappy at the exclusive stress on cottages), the exceedingly complex 'YDG Mk 1' range of 5-7 storey deck-access blocks was built from 1966 in prefabricated large-panel construction; the builder, Shepherd of York, enjoyed very mixed fortunes on this large contract. (I.II. 37) From the early 1970s onwards, prefabrication was jettisoned by the architectural establishment in favour of a further rationalistic permutation of the 'open systems' ideal - that of 'dimensional
1971 view of 'YDG Mark 1' scheme at Bransholme Area A3, Kingston upon Hull, built from 1969 by Shepherd; in the distance, one of two 17-storey point blocks erected at Bransholme by L. H. Beal and Robinson.
coordination'. Now the YDG architects were progressively absorbed by the Leeds City Architect's Department, where they were employed to work up standard cottage-plans. The MHC, although envisaged by some member boroughs as a collective bulwark against the designs of 'Big Brother' Birmingham, was in reality an architectural grouping devised by Arthur Ling in late 1961 on the model of Nottinghamshire's schools programme, with the aim of producing an 'open system' for cottage construction. After its formal constitution in 1963, MHC was closely overseen from Coventry.

Although a vast array of consortia sprang into being during the remainder of the decade, none approached even the modest importance of these three. In 1965, for example, a London Housing Consortium (along with constituent North, West and South London Groups) was formed with MHLG encouragement as part of a major local-government reorganisation; it was based on an existing Development Group of London, Middlesex and Essex authorities. However, the LHC proved a toothless organisation, its programmes effectively confined to the leftover sites of outer boroughs with big land surpluses. And while consortia were of marginal importance to large municipalities, at the other extreme many smaller towns were able, without too much trouble, to slip through the consortium and 'industrialisation' net altogether.
"SYSTEMS" AND THE N.B.A.

"System building, as it developed in Britain, was a panacea indeed - it promised the benefits of a revolution in building without a revolution actually taking place". B. Finnimore

The public and professional debate concerning 'system building' had been initiated by architects for their own purposes. However, during the mid-1960s building boom, it then took on a transient life of its own, and was adopted as a handy catchphrase by other groups involved in the housing drive - in particular, by contractors and Government Ministers. To MHLG, 'system building' was useful for two reasons. Firstly, it provided a slogan which could be used to justify the expanded public housing drive to the Treasury, on the tenuous grounds that this would help modernise the building industry. Ministers could not be seen standing idly by while the major housing authorities and contractors forced their own way through the worsening building-industry overload; when large sums of money were being sought from the Exchequer, a token show of central coordination had to be made, for the benefit of both Treasury and public opinion.

'System building' was also of some assistance to MHLG, as a kind of propaganda football to be exploited during a brief power-struggle with the Ministry of Public Building and Works over the direction of housebuilding policy. The focus of this dispute was the National Building Agency, an organisation which had originally been conceived in 1963 by the Ministry of Public Building and Works, under Geoffrey Rippon, as a means of establishing a substantial power-base in the housing field. MPBW's intention had been to set up a central agency to coordinate all local authority building programmes - foremost among which, of course, was housing. This 'super-CLASP' would be overseen by MPBW's Director-General of Research and Development, D.E.E. Gibson. But after the Ministry of Works took the unprecedented step of issuing circulars on housing to local authorities, Dame Evelyn Sharp weighed in to call a halt to what was rapidly becoming a very threatening erosion of MHLG's position. While she paid fulsome lip-service to the ideal of
'systems', she saw to it that the NBA, when it was eventually set up in March 1964, was administratively stifled at birth. The Agency was denied any direct departmental patronage, and was kept at several removes from the housing production process. Its only tasks were advisory and ancillary: to 'certify' that particular methods of construction constituted 'systems', and to encourage (on behalf of MHLG and MPBW) the formation of local-authority consortia which might use them to build housing. But the official definition of 'systems' was so wide as to be almost meaningless; and the NBA was prevented by Sharp (in England and Wales) from certifying high flats, the real driving force of prefabrication. The reason for this was, of course, to avoid ruffling the feathers of the many municipal and commercial vested interests now committed to multi-storey building. During the 1960s, frustrated by its lack of power in the field of building construction, the NBA diversified into management consultancy, where it advised with mixed success on the organisation of programmes such as those of Liverpool and Tower Hamlets; and it became bound up with that final variant of 'open systems', the 'dimensional coordination' movement.

Despite his own sympathy towards the ideal of 'open systems', and his dislike of multi-storey flats, Sir Keith Joseph was well aware that package-deal high blocks would provide the only straightforward way of raising output quickly. His Labour successors established supposedly mandatory quotas of 'system' building: but these, although a useful publicity device to pull in small straggler authorities, had little impact on the building policies of the big cities. They could choose either to exploit the slogan of 'systems', like Parker Morris, as just one more justification for expensive multi-storey negotiated contracts. Or they could, if they wished, simply refuse to comply with the policy. In Scotland, the NBA's branch office did involve itself with high flats, but its interventions merely formed one part of the wider housing campaign of the dynamic junior housing Minister (from 1964), Dr. J. Dickson Mabon.

By 1964, however, the architectural debates associated with 'system building' and consortia had reached such a fever pitch that the building
industry briefly became concerned that the architectural profession might succeed in making real inroads on its territory. The journal The Builder therefore organised an investigation, the so-called 'Roskill Report', which identified a number of claimed disadvantages of consortia. A further complication in assessing the influence of the architectural 'systems' campaign was the fact that, during the mid and late 1960s, high flats' share of officially-defined 'industrialised' output (in England and Wales) declined from initial preponderance to around 35% - suggesting, at first sight, that the architects' pressure was having progressive effect. However, as many contracts included both high and low blocks, it is perhaps rather more significant that 69% of this output, between 1965 and 1973, comprised 'systems' with a multi-storey capacity.

Certainly, large-panel concrete prefabrication was known from the beginning to be highly expensive for low blocks built on their own, although some contractors later found that large orders, such as the Lanarkshire consortium's Camus programme, might yield modest profits. In the West Midlands, largely on the basis of Birmingham contracts, over 12,500 Bryant Low Rise dwellings were built. But there were inherent inefficiencies involved: not least, that the dispersed layouts associated with low blocks prevented effective use of equipment and slowed down assembly processes. For instance, five-storey 12M Jespersen blocks under construction by Laing for Glenrothes New Town Development Corporation, in 1966, were sited so far apart that each building required its own crane.

The only true opening for prefabrication in the field of low blocks concerned lightweight forms of prefabricated or 'rationalised traditional' construction: timber-framing, reconstituted china-clay waste, and so forth. Only here could the initiatives of the NBA or local consortia make some considerable impact, especially in English cities where the land situation had eased: as, for instance, in the case of the YDG authorities, with their proliferation of two-storey house-types. But as these cities' programmes largely comprised terraced cottages, which in England had in any case long been built in a highly
'rationalised' manner with many standardised and bulk-ordered components, they largely fall outside the scope of this thesis.

However, many authorities, especially those outside consortia, remained unwilling to consider prefabrication other than in a multi-storey context, while a range of rural or smaller urban authorities still contrived to dodge the Government's 'system building' net altogether. In 1966, for example, the Clerk of Whitstable Urban District Council reported that 'industrialised' building was mainly aimed at larger towns, while Fife County Council's Housing Committee informed SDD that 'system building would be of no assistance in erecting houses because of the use of gap sites, employing their own Works Department.'

The relatively modest level of use of prefabrication, over the country as a whole, gave little support to the official rhetoric of building-industry modernisation. In England and Wales, the proportion of public housing tender approvals classified as 'industrialised' - using MHLG's very broad definition, which included many non-prefabricated methods - rose from 28% in 1965 to a very brief peak of 42% in 1967, but then plummeted away back down to 19% in 1970.
ARCHITECT-LED PREFABRICATION: BATTLECRY OR BOMBAST?

During the mid-1960s, the fears of the Roskill report concerning the encroachment of architect-controlled 'open system building' on contractors' preserves had proved to be groundless. Outside the LCC and GLC, and a few other authorities committed to individual design, the architects' campaign exerted, in reality, remarkably little influence over the routine production of Modern housing, as it spread to municipalities up and down the country.

Some architects, seeking to explain or excuse this defeat, attempted to 'cry foul' and to attribute it to the power of concealed industrial and political vested interests, possibly associated in some kind of conspiracy to unseat the architectural establishment from its God-given role of hegemony over building. One private architect in Glasgow recalled that 'we resented the success of the package deals, and assumed bribery was at work - it was work we could have been doing, because they were taking it away from us!' This self-confirming interpretation has been elaborated by recent architectural historians, bound up with the architectural cause. For instance Andrew Saint laments the failure of design-minded public housing architects to equal the tight control their education colleagues achieved over not only the design but also the process of school-building: the MHLG Development Group, he complains, was set up 'too late... lines had long been drawn in the battle for housing production, the contractors were in command... the influence and sanity it [the Group] tried to dispense were never strong enough, especially in the dire days of heavy panel housing construction'. He takes it as self-evident that the aims of development groups' architects were identical with the needs of local authorities: by contrast, the 'devastating' multi-storey package deals were 'geared to the convenience of the crane and the accountant, not of the tenant or housing committee'.

It will be seen in Chapter 5 that the reason for the impact of large contractors and their package deals during those 'dire days' of vigorous housing production was the very opposite of that hinted at by Saint.
The contractors succeeded not because they bullied and bribed weak councils into adopting building policies against their best interests (or, even, wishes), but because they provided politically and organisationally powerful municipalities with exactly what the latter required: multi-storey blocks, built reliably and in large numbers, with the minimum of fussing and overspending.

The pragmatic basis of package-deal negotiation, design and building contrasted forcibly with the 'R & D' work of many public and private architects, which was divorced from the main thrust of the production of Modern housing in the 1960s. This separation took two main forms - both of which, ironically, conflicted with key tenets of Modern architectural theory. The first was that the architects' work was individualistic and insulated from the daily reality of contracting and building, despite assertions that architect-designed and controlled 'systems' would provide the foundation for mass-production tied into production needs. The MHLG Development Group glided smoothly from one research project to another, designing what it wanted, elegantly skirting round any involvement with high flats, and allocating most of its key projects to Laing, builder to the architectural establishment. Similarly, the DHS/SSHA Joint Development Unit, from its very foundation in 1959, avoided any significant contact with Glasgow's multi-storey housing drive. The Assistant Secretary whose duties included oversight of MHLG Development Group projects in the mid-1960s recalls that the architects 'would say, "Right! Now we've finished 5M! Let's get on to the next one!"' The Group's ivory-tower perfectionism was also displayed in its sociologists' stipulation that, to provide controlled results, slum-clearance tenants destined for the Family Houses I project should be of 'very high quality'. Yet no evidence seems to have been brought forward at the time, or subsequently, that development group designs were superior to those of contractors, either in terms of performance or cost. The only private architect of national significance who attempted seriously to bridge the gap between the profession and the contractors was Sam Bunton. As a result, other architects ridiculed him as a maverick: 'We all used to joke about him - we'd say "He's not really an architect!"' He used to advertise himself... he admired big business!"
Secondly, the initiatives of designers in the field of building organisation were divorced from the entire climate of urgent, locally-based housing demands. Instead, they were derived from national, professional ideals, which, in the architects' opinion, transcended the parochialism and myopia of local housing committees and the commercial concerns of the builders. The LCC took pride in this standpoint: 'The one thing we were determined to do was not to become like Glasgow or those other places, in the sense of those enormous, featureless package-deal blocks!' Government architects closely followed the LCC lead: as we have already seen, MHLG Architects intervened on visual grounds to prevent Salford's City Engineer from developing the Ellor Street area with his own slab blocks, while the DHS-SSHA Joint Development Unit refused even to consider gap sites for its first development project. Under the architectural direction of Harold Buteux, the SSHA itself was transformed into a centre of designer-controlled constructional innovation:

'Previously, what they were interested in was producing dwellings which were all the same. On my first day, there was a senior architect, a dear old boy, with no idea about planning. I asked, "Let me see what you've got!" He got out the stuff on about six schemes, and said, "We get the engineers to put in the roads, and then give it to the contractors to build standard blocks." I said, "We'll have to change this!" He said, "Oh no, you can't!" So the first thing I had to do was to double the size of the office and then redouble it, and to do my own standard designs to negotiate from. But the trouble was, the local authorities kept asking us to use the old blocks. They were so popular!' 42

It was only in 'regional' authorities such as the SSHA or the LCC, exempt from any really urgent local housing needs, or in architect-controlled programmes such as those of Coventry or Norwich, that production could be subordinated and the design lobby properly satisfied. Any attempt to steer a middle course only exposed the yawning gap between the two viewpoints. For instance Lambeth LBC, in the mid-1960s, introduced architecturally sophisticated new types, including elaborately-modelled prefabricated point-blocks and 'low rise high density' patterns, while at the same time attempting to raise output to a limited extent. The borough's councillors were very enthusiastic about both the design and production aspects of their
policy. But one ex-LCC architect involved in the design of the 'low rise' types expressed a sharply different opinion: 'The councillors were very different from the LCC members - they were at a much lower level, they only wanted architects because it gave them prestige. I had nothing to do with the point blocks, thank God - they were a bit inhuman!' 

So one does not require to postulate any external influence or nefarious behind-the-scenes machinations, to explain how the powerful and articulate design lobby came to be defeated in its attempt to wrest back control of the building of Modern housing during the early 1960s. It will be demonstrated below that contractual pressure almost never influenced or determined the paramount issue of Modern housing production in major British cities - whether to embark on wholesale building of multi-storey flats. Rather, the large contractors intervened to secure their own share of large high-flat programmes already in prospect. Saint hints at the real reason for the failure of 'design' to gain control of 'production', when he ruefully observes that, in contrast to schools, 'housing has never been permitted to become a professional matter. We all live in houses, we all have opinions about them'. And in cities such as Glasgow or Liverpool, only one 'opinion' seemed of importance to councillors: that the maximum number of dwellings should be built for their people, within their city boundaries, as quickly as possible and whatever the cost. 

We discussed above the origins of a 'conflict' between design and production for control of the building process, which was expressed for instance in the 'Roskill Report'. But, as will be revealed below, during the 1960s, this contest became increasingly one-sided. Eventually, many of those who were urgently concerned with output in big cities - housing committee members, housing engineers, estates' valuers, package-deal contractors - reached the point where they were, or seemed to be, completely unaware of the initiatives and lobbying of 'designers'.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 3


4964 p. 117; MHLG architects' use of car parking costs as justification for a 100-140ppa ceiling on redevelopment: JRIA April 1962, p. 154.

7 Southall MBC HC 9-4-1962, 4-10-1962, 10-1-1963.


21 Morris Walk: LCC HC 24-2-1965; AJ 27-5-1964 p. 1182; interview Richardson. 'MW' point blocks built subsequently: (by LCC) at Argyle Estate 4th Section, Wandsworth; (by GLC) at Bradstock Road, Hackney; Hartopp Avenue, Hammersmith; Brixton Hill, Lambeth; Drysdale Road, Lewisham; Camelot Street, Southwark; Alpha Grove Extension, Barley Mow, Cayley Street, Jefferson Street, Tower Hamlets.


26 Salford, Cleeve Barr, McWilliam: HLG 131-19, 6-12-1960 Fox-Wickenden, 8-12-1960 Barr-Clayton.


31 'Panacea': Finimore, p. 371.

32 For contrary view, 'conspiracy' interpretation of 'systems' as centralised scheme imposed by capitalist State to stave off revolution: Finimore, pp. 79, 98.


34 'Utterly ludicrous': int. Bowie.

35 Joseph on high blocks, Arcons: int. Joseph. 'System' quotes in 'National Housing Plan': MHLG circulars 21/65, 76/65. Use of 'system' quota to justify expensive MS contracts, such as Aldwell Street Wimpey scheme, Portsmouth: Council 12-4-1966. Walsall CBC Special HC 16-6-1965 on high flats: Circular 21-65 used as argument for continuing to
negotiate with Wates; Wates then battery-cast later Walsall schemes so they could be termed 'system built'. Authorities openly refusing to adopt 'system' quota: Stretford MBC HC 3-2-1966, int. Homer; Barnsley CBC HC 29-9-1965 (Sheffield Road); Bristol CBC, Dunleavy, op. cit., pp. 322-6; Edinburgh BC, int. Rogan, Corner, Theurer. NBA in Scotland: SRO DB6-2362 paper 2-12-1964, and 4-12-1964 meeting NBA-junior Minister; OAP, November 1966, pp. 1458-62.


38 YDG 2 storey cottages: CHAC 5-6-1964, 13-6-1966. Another enthusiastic authority: Bedford MBC 15-4-1964, discussing 'HDC' houses. Unwillingness to consider prefabrication for low blocks: for instance Dundee Town Clerk's files, letter Bett to Town Clerk 16-9-1963; HC 18-10-1964 was now offering Bison high flats; also Sale MBC HC 14-2-1964 on Fir Rd (high block to have precast cladding, but not the 3-storey block: latter should be 'traditional'), Whitstable UDC Public Health Committee 8-8-1966; Fife CC HC 22-3-1966 page M275.

39 Proportion of 'IS' in England and Wales: Dunleavy, op. cit., p. 64 (derived from DoE files). Karl Cohen reported to NBA that YDG cottages took half as long to build as English average, and Councillor Pattinson replied that 'systems' applied to so little of national output that overall completion rates would be hardly affected: CHAC 5-6-1964. See also CHAC 14-2-1966, 13-6-1966 for Cohen enthusiasm on YDG. Cohen led Association of Municipal Corporations Study Tour of Sweden and Denmark in 1963: Municipal Review September 1963 p. 570.

40 'We resented...': int. Bercott. Saint on architects' failure: Saint, pp. 228, 231.


43 'Very different': int. former Lambeth architect. 'Horrific', 'awful': int. Denington.

44 'Saint hints': Saint, p. 228.
"Those were memorable years — everything went with a bang, and money was no object to a big-hearted Government!" P. Rogan

By the early 1960s, although output had still not recovered, many of the administrative changes which would be necessary if the pioneering high-flat programmes of the big cities were to be converted into a building boom throughout urban Britain were unobtrusively being implemented. Most importantly, in 1961 MHLG restored general-needs subsidies, thus coming back into line with the Department of Health for Scotland. The latter, since 1957, had been skilfully fending off Treasury anti-general-needs pressure by various stratagems, which ranged from ringing but empty declarations of intent such as Circular 33/1960 to the ad-hoc manipulation of tender approval rates or the level of the SSHA programme. But what was still lacking throughout the whole of Britain was any trustworthy way to ensure that assistance would reach those that needed it most: urban authorities wishing to embark on vigorous building, but prevented from doing so (at least, without prohibitive rent or rate rises) by a lack of large prewar estates, and consequent inability to cross-subsidise rents. In many cases, the programmes of active urban authorities had declined, during the late 1950s, to a much greater degree than the average decrease throughout Britain.

As a first step towards the aim of weighting subsidies towards less well-off urban authorities, the 1961 English and 1962 Scottish Housing Acts brought in a differential subsidy system intended to discriminate in favour of municipalities with large Housing Revenue Account deficits: this was done by providing these councils with a unit subsidy of £24 in England and Wales and £32 in Scotland, while other authorities were left with a unit subsidy of, respectively, £8 and £12 (intended by officials explicitly as a 'sweetener'); the higher-rate authorities also qualified for further discretionary supplements of up to £24. Brooke had, at first, also fancifully hoped that this change might also be of party-political benefit, by forcing lower-rate authorities to make good the
loss by raising their rents. But by the time that drafting of the legislation was properly underway, in 1960, MHLG Administrators had grasped that, in reality, it would be 'a very puny weapon' as far as rent levels were concerned: in England at any rate, those major authorities committed to low-rent policies were often those with large prewar housing stocks, as in the case of Manchester, and would thus easily be able to circumvent this obstacle by subsidy pooling.

Evaluating MHLG's White Paper from the perspective of Northern Ireland, where 'economic rents' were already the rule, Ronald Green (Secretary of Stormont's Ministry of Health) confessed himself puzzled: 'The test of need is interesting, but none of us here can see how any such test will encourage councils with a weak rent policy to strengthen it. Those who wish to charge a substantial balancing figure to rates will continue to do so, and their action will not affect their eligibility for the higher subsidy'. The equivalent subsidy regime in Scotland, brought in by the 1962 Act, offered DHS Administrators no hope whatsoever of coaxing up rent levels. As one Principal despairingly pointed out, after having calculated the hypothetical effect of one year's complete loss of subsidy on Glasgow Corporation's Housing Revenue Account: 'After all, what is another 1d. on the rates when they are already standing at about 28s. in the £?'

But the chief aim of the new subsidy regime was, it must be emphasised, that of raising output: and, in this respect, the large, relatively autonomous authorities like Glasgow or Manchester certainly found it to be a useful encouragement, but not a vital necessity. Its function was, rather, that of fleshing out a potential nationwide urban housing drive by assisting some medium-sized authorities which had not previously been able to afford large-scale building, to join in now. A typical case was that of Leyton MBC, a metropolitan Essex suburb of 100,000 population. Leyton had built a mere 353 dwellings before World War II, and 1,479 between 1945 and 1961, of which just 3% were multi-storey. In that year - the year of the new subsidies - the Housing Committee decisively altered course, and embarked on a crash drive of slum-clearance and high-flat construction. A further 1,347 dwellings were built or commenced in the three years to the end of 1964, 60% of which were
multi-storey. Leyton’s Housing Committee’s Chairman, John Walsh, triumphantly listed these dramatic changes in his introduction to a commemorative booklet issued by the Committee just prior to the Borough’s dissolution in the 1965 local-government reorganisation:

‘TODAY - slum clearance is no longer just a resolution on the minutes of the Council’s agenda. The forward march has begun. The bulldozers are on the move, the slums are coming down, cranes overhang the skyline, “tall tower” buildings are taking shape - eleven, seventeen, twenty-one storeys’.  

In England and Wales, these subsidy changes were followed, in 1963, by alterations to MHLG’s allocations system. Increasingly, the threadbare system of annual regulation was left in the background, and most attention was devoted to assessment of five or six-year forward programmes. Many active urban municipalities still continued building mainly or wholly for slum-clearance, such as Stretford MBC, or Salford CBC (the latter augmenting its postwar stock of council dwellings by 70% between 1960 and 1966); conversely, some authorities preoccupied with resistance to population loss chose to augment their multi-storey building by raising the level of rates further, as in the case of some new London boroughs. By way of complete contrast, a number of county boroughs now moved to reduce or eliminate their rate subsidy, through moderate rent rises in the case of right-wing Labour authorities, such as Leeds and Birmingham, and, in the case of Conservative-controlled Portsmouth, by introduction of exceptionally high rents. In all cases, however, there was much greater flexibility all round. In Scotland, there was a different outcome, influenced by the very close link between output and high flats which was becoming established, especially in Glasgow. Here, the replacement of the variable additional multi-storey subsidy by a flat-rate £40 supplement in the 1962 Act, and the arguments contained in the Parker Morris report, were both grasped with relief by Administrators, as providing an excuse to remove all cost restraints on the authorities now queuing up with multi-storey programmes.  

Correspondingly, the subsidy reforms choked off the building programmes of many smaller or rural authorities, and sprawling cities such as
Ipswich with large existing cottage estates. However, Scottish rural programmes, run by the powerful county councils, often benefited from the new arrangements, especially in those depressed areas dotted with rundown mining villages. The small burghs, on the other hand, were generally discouraged by the subsidy changes. These fragmented towns made up three-quarters of the 234 local housing authorities in Scotland and varied in population from 20,000 to only 300. DHS Administrators were closely involved in coordinating and regulating these programmes: one recollects that the smallest burghs were above all 'concerned about the rates. Whereas Glasgow could build a hell of a lot of houses in a year with little effect, because of their large number of existing houses, the burgh of Culross, with only 500 inhabitants, had to put sixpence on the rates if it built a single house!' The programmes of rural district councils in England and Wales, in any case subject to constant tinkering by the county councils, also went into marked decline. The rural districts were mainly worried that their rents were, or would become, too high for agricultural workers to afford; they were not allowed to borrow on the open market and were thus immediately and seriously affected by interest-rate rises. Most of these rural authorities were looked on by MHLG Administrators as being, in output terms, 'hopeless' cases, with members and officers of uniformly low calibre. Indeed, some rural district councils had stopped building altogether, even before the subsidy changes.
THE 'NATIONAL HOUSING PLAN'

These financial provisions paved much of the way for a large-scale boom in building of Modern flats throughout urban Britain. However, two significant organisational deficiencies still stood in the way of this aim. The first, in England and Wales only, was a lack of political and administrative driving force within MHLG, to keep pace with the energy of the newly-unleashed large housebuilding authorities; the second was a fresh financial bottleneck, ironically partly caused by the recovery of output.

Within the Ministry of Housing, the chief obstacle in the early 1960s was not lack of Ministerial authority but the absence of a Ministerial 'progress-chaser' who might keep civil servants and laggardly large authorities such as Manchester on their toes. Joseph himself admitted that his junior Minister, F. Corfield, was really only allocated 'random responsibilities'. Within DHS (SDD from 1962) the trouble was more fundamental, stemming from the Government's underlying political weakness on the housing question, exacerbated by the lack of charisma of some Scottish Unionist housing Ministers. 7

During the first years of the new Labour Government, from 1964, much attention was occupied by highly-publicised national initiatives in economic planning and modernisation, nominally coordinated by George Brown's Department of Economic Affairs. In Scotland, Sir Douglas Haddow, on becoming head of the Scottish Office in 1964, raised the SDD philosophy of planned development to an exalted supra-departmental status, by placing James McGuinness in charge of a new praetorian-guard grouping, the Regional Development Division. Officials such as Haddow, McGuinness or Robert Grieve (now Scottish Development Department Chief Planner), believed that housing policy should now be governed by overspill to 'growth centres', as just one component of a vast, Government-directed reordering of industry and population across the whole of Scotland. From this cosmic perspective, it no longer seemed good enough to strip the burghs and cities of their autonomy piecemeal. Now there beckoned the far greater prize of local-government
reorganisation, which would stamp the hegemony of Clyde Valley Plan thinking across the whole country, through strong regional authorities which could impose their will on Glasgow and the second-rank large burghs.

Some recent historians of housing have attempted to identify this public 'modernisation of Britain' campaign as a central influence or determinant over housing policy, and have devoted much attention to analysis of public pronouncements by Ministers or housing establishment figures, advocating greater 'comprehensiveness' in policymaking. By contrast, this account stresses the importance of more prosaic organisational factors in housing production, mostly at work out of the public eye. We have already seen that the political and architectural rhetoric of 'mass production' and 'system building' was curiously detached from the day-to-day business of the organisation of building. The same was true of political rhetoric concerning housing and its place in 'national economic planning'. Here, Joseph's 'national target' for completions was expanded by Labour into a 'National Housing Plan', itself supposedly an offshoot of the DEA 'National Plan'. But while the rhetoric of DEA and Scottish Office thinkers was soaring into the stratosphere, the underlying political and organisational realities of public housing production processes had changed very little.

If any activity at Central Government level exerted significant influence over the expansion of public housing production during the mid-1960s, it was, undoubtedly, that least public activity of all: the continuous process of negotiation between the Treasury and spending departments, with the aim (on the part of the latter) of securing authorisation of a higher rate of building and, where necessary to this end, higher subsidies. The only real usefulness of the 'National Housing Plan' was here - as a way of bolstering the spending departments' negotiating position through sheer overwhelming volume of paper, reports, statistics, rhetoric, hyperbole. Equally important, however, was the forcefulness in Cabinet of the new Minister of Housing (from 1964), Richard Crossman. Although he was something of a maverick liable to 'argue against what he'd just made people agree to', Crossman
nevertheless proved remarkably adept at prising additional cash out of the Treasury at a time of growing economic difficulty. " (Ill. 137)

To ensure that additional resources resulted in higher output, Crossman allocated a specific progress-chaser role, particularly concerning London, to one of his junior ministers, Robert Mellish. Within the Ministry, Mellish saw it as his task to 'activate the whole Department with enthusiasm', to make sure that the largest housebuilding authorities were supported by rapid processing of loan-scanion applications and programme proposals: from 1965, loan sanction approval was often immediate, rather than delayed by several months. Outside the Department, Mellish's influence and network of contacts as Chairman of the London Labour Party made it possible for him to galvanise the new London Boroughs in the former LCC area, and (to a much lesser extent), those in outer London, into commencing a vigorous push for numbers: 'Bob was a real live wire in London!' " (Ill. 38)

Some local authorities found Labour's new policy of much closer Ministerial involvement in the housing drive to be a somewhat mixed blessing, in view of Crossman's volatile temperament. A former Administrator in Housing Division 'B' recalls one typically tempestuous meeting in July 1966, at which a preliminary proposal for Hammersmith LBC's ambitious White City redevelopment was personally vetoed by the Minister:

'There was an initial phase I'd recommended allowing, but because it was expensive it went right up to Crossman. He'd initialled it as agreed. Before the meeting with Hammersmith we talked, and he said, "We can't allow this!" I said, "Minister, you've agreed to it." He said, "I didn't." I got the file and, with trepidation, showed it to Crossman, with his initials. He snapped, "Look at the date - it's a month ago!" And that wasn't a joke! Of course, he could have been under pressure from the Treasury in some way that we weren't to know. Anyway, it put him in a terrific temper. J.H. Waddell, the Deputy Secretary, standing behind Crossman's back, shrugged his shoulders as if to say to me, "Poor chap, at the receiving end of this!" So then Crossman stormed into the meeting and took it out in a really outrageous way on the Hammersmith Labour councillors, who'd been waiting all the time in the next room, and flatly turned down the scheme!' One commentator recalls of the Minister: 'At Winchester, Crossman once beat a boy so badly as almost to maim him... he was fantastically
Official opening of Angel House, Edmonton, on 24 July 1965, by Robert Mellish. From left to right: Mr. and Mrs. Henry Green (New tenants of 3 Angel House), Councillor E. J. C. Smythe (Chairman, Enfield LBC Housing Committee), R. J. Mellish (MHLG Joint Parliamentary Secretary), and Councillor Miss Kit Harvey (Mayor, Enfield LBC). Angel House (or Block A of the Angel Road South development), was EDLO's first battery-cast multi-storey block.
thoughtless in public and private relations, he left bruised feelings wherever he went, he was egotistical, he was treacherous; "Double-Crossman" was a nickname dating from his schooldays'. Following Crossman's replacement as Minister by Anthony Greenwood in 1966, much of the Ministry's driving force was dissipated - although Mellish retained his MHLG Parliamentary Secretary post. Greenwood was, in administrative terms, a rather more balanced and stable figure than Crossman - 'a medium-weight Minister, perfectly able to hold his weight in Cabinet: you knew where you were with Greenwood, one of the great things for an Administrator!' But he was much less ready than Crossman to adopt a confrontational attitude towards the Treasury, and his period as Minister was seen by some local authorities as lacking in dynamic initiatives. The former Housing Committee Chairman of Ealing LBC ruefully recalls: 'It was like having a wet flannel pushed in your face!' (Ill. 39) By contrast, Mellish was a prodigiously energetic figure - although, admittedly, equalled in this respect by his Scottish counterpart, J. Dickson Mabon: Mabon's work will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The question of the degree of charisma projected by one Minister as against another, was of course very much a matter of personal opinion. What was accepted by everyone during this period, was the fact that the Government's dependence on the largest and most active municipalities, in the quest for higher output, was undiminished. This made essential a further concentration of assistance. Most public attention was of course claimed by Crossman's dramatic public relations initiatives, based on the National Housing Plan and the sometimes flippant 'upping' of national housing targets. But more concrete help, in England, was provided by modification of the allocations system, to achieve close coordination with the four-year housing programmes demanded by Circular 21/65. A group of around 140 'priority authorities' was established, whose programmes covered 60% of public housing output; these included the 34 London Boroughs and 106 provincial authorities (the latter grouping being fixed in 1966). Among these, the dozen or so highest performers were singled out for especially favourable treatment - setting up a 'virtuous circle' of output leading to more output. In
Official opening of Enfield LBC's 10,000th new postwar dwelling (131, Bounces Road, Edmonton), on 14 January 1967, by the Minister of Housing, Anthony Greenwood. From left to right: Councillor Charles Wright (Mayor, Enfield LBC), Mr. and Mrs. Edward Robertson (new tenants), Anthony Greenwood (Minister of Housing), and Councillor Eric Smythe (Chairman, Enfield LBC Housing Committee).
Greater London, production levels prior to the 1965 local-government reorganisation had been particularly low: therefore, no allocation restrictions were applied after 1966. Elsewhere, the redistribution of Government support to large towns made vigorous building by small municipalities difficult, although the odd determined and fairly wealthy urban district, such as Northfleet UDC, might still decide to use up an entire year's allocation by building a single point block.
THE VARIABLE SUBSIDY

It was, however, clear to Ministers that the 'great heartache' of the cities was still finance. The differential subsidies introduced by the 1961/2 Acts were not only trailing well behind building cost inflation, which was averaging 32% between 1961 and 1964 (in England and Wales), but had done nothing whatsoever to remedy what was by far the greatest financial problem: the unprecedentedly high and rising level of interest rates - above all after the introduction of the 7% Bank Rate in 1964.

On the question of interest rates, if MHLG was facing disquieting pressure from the county boroughs, SDD was finding itself under siege from Glasgow Corporation: the latter, by 1964, was facing a serious and growing annual housing revenue account deficit of around £4m., owing to the inadequacy of the 1962 Act's higher rate basic subsidy of £32 (or even the discretionary maximum of £56) and £40 high-flat supplement, as a basis to support the expanded multi-storey housing drive on which (as will be shown in Chapter 6) the Housing Committee had by then embarked. As the Corporation incessantly pointed out, both the basic subsidy and the high-flat supplement were insufficient for multi-storey construction on the enormous scale desired by the Committee.

The Government's response to this growing municipal clamour was new subsidy legislation, proposed in 1965 but not enacted until 1966 (in England and Wales) and 1967 (in Scotland). The new system set out to return some of the way to Addison Act 'cost-plus' principles, by introducing a partly deficit-based subsidy which closely resembled a system introduced in 1962 by Northern Ireland's Ministry of Health and Local Government. The new subsidy was calculated to absorb all interest charges above 4%, and was back-dated to 1965 as a device to reward the most immediately active of the new London boroughs. Through its partly 'cost-plus' basis, the new framework was intended to avoid any discrimination against the high-cost multi-storey form - although, equally, it was not intended to encourage large authorities to build any more high flats than they already had in mind. So as to avoid duplication of the basic subsidy, the English and Welsh high-flat supplement was at the same time reduced, through the adoption of SDD's
flat-rate system, while the latter was cut from £40 to £30 – a change which had the effect of favouring smaller-sized multi-storey blocks (under 10 storeys in height). It should, however, be borne in mind that, in contrast to Addison, the new system was not open-ended: if local authorities spent more, they would always be faced with a proportion of the resulting additional bill.  

Crossman later claimed that the variable subsidy was a Labour Party political initiative which had to be imposed on unwilling civil servants; Mellish, too, recalled that it was conceived at political level, to answer the alarm of the housing leaders of the large cities at interest rate increases. Yet the resemblance to the Northern Ireland subsidy was quite uncanny. On balance, it seems that there is an element of truth on both sides: that a general, politically-inspired Ministerial directive led Administrators to look around quickly for practical means of implementation, and that the Northern Ireland subsidy system (itself indirectly indebted to the Scottish 1957 Act's multi-storey supplement) was taken up as a relatively ready-made formula. Undoubtedly, at the very least, the Treasury would have cross-checked the precise details of the new scheme with those of the Province's system, when it was being drawn up. Another possible influence was the percentage-grant system used for the financing of school building in the 1950s and early 1960s.

At first, Government Administrators were opposed to the new subsidy, partly because it was so generous (a fact that they feared would lead to a vicious circle of soaring output, overheating and higher costs), but, above all, because of its complexity. They anticipated that it might well prove administratively unworkable, because of the involved calculations necessary for each scheme: 'It would have been a nightmare to operate and a field of bitter dispute with local authorities - the authorities wouldn't like it because they couldn't plan'. So eventually, taking advantage of the delay in its introduction caused by the intervention of a General Election, Administrators contrived to link the new financial structure to a system of cost limits – 'indicative costs' in Scotland, mandatory 'yardsticks' in England and Wales. These
controls resurrected the 'people's house' principle of the early 1950s: higher output within set costs, if necessary at the expense of housing 'standards'.

The Scottish Development Department, always relatively well-provided for in its administrative staffing levels, felt able to operate these 'indicative costs' straightforwardly on a value-for-money basis; here the new financial structure indeed helped to sustain the housing drive and, even, to revive multi-storey building after its sharp dip in 1968. On occasion, the link between indicative costs, density and (implicitly) building type was used as an excuse for the raising of densities and building of higher blocks on supposedly 'low-density' sites. In 1969-70, for example, following a prediction that high site servicing costs would be involved in the case of an outer-suburban mixed development planned for construction on the site of a former rubbish dump at Seaton, Aberdeen, SDD Housing Administrators suggested that the proposed density for the scheme should be raised from 117 to 198 p.p.a., and that seven 19-storey point-blocks should be inserted, so as to obtain a suitably high indicative cost for this awkward site. (III. 40) In MHLG almost the opposite applied: the architects and quantity surveyors, and 'Treasury fifth columnists' among the Administrators, were able to impose their own interpretation of the new controls, which they treated as a simple mandatory extension of Bellamy's advisory 'yardsticks'. Against the initial intentions of the Administrators who had introduced them, the MHLG mandatory yardsticks were employed, along with rigid density restrictions, as a way of directly suppressing multi-storey building. In England, especially in Greater London, 'beating the yardstick' often served the interests of design rather than production. Under the influence of increasingly powerful local authority architects such as Ted Hollamby of Lambeth LBC, 'low rise high density' schemes, cheaper in construction, were squeezed on to sites, to make possible the diversion of allowable expenditure at any given density into lavish architectural features, and landscaping. (19)

The sharp differences in administrative practice between Scotland on the one hand, and England and Wales on the other, help explain how (under

Phase 1 (comprising three 10-storey blocks in in-situ construction) was built from 1971 by a local contractor, P. Cameron; this firm also acted as main contractor for the seven 19-storey Bison Wall-Frame blocks of Phase 2, built from 1972.
supposedly uniform subsidy arrangements) Scotland still contrived to maintain the highest combined level of Exchequer and rate subsidy contributions to council housebuilding in the UK. In 1967-8, for example, 60% of the cost of an average new council dwelling in Scotland was met in this way, as against 24% in England and Wales and 41% in Northern Ireland. 19

In 1964, a further complication was introduced into Britain’s regional variations in Government housing administration, when responsibility for public housing policy in Wales was devolved to the newly-created Welsh Office. In the field of housing production, however, any changes were at first cosmetic: there were no rapid divergences from the English patterns, let alone the creation of any wholly distinctive housing policy in the manner of Scotland or Northern Ireland. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, housing legislation and subsidies were still prepared jointly with MHLG. Secondly, there was little real alteration to administrative structures. Before 1964, the future Welsh Office’s staff were already based at Cathays Park, Cardiff, as a Welsh regional office of MHLG (under J.W.M. Siberry). After reorganisation, the same Housing Administrators, Architects and Planners remained in place, although a new Housing Division was created in 1966. Apart from any other considerations, however, Modern flats, especially high flats, were to be built in such small numbers in Wales compared to other equivalent areas of the UK, that the precise details of Welsh housing administration are of secondary importance in the context of this thesis. 20
THROUGH 'ON THE NOD'?

By the early 1960s, large municipalities' adaptation of multi-storey blocks to the purposes of large-scale production, supported but not determined by the Government's alterations to the subsidy structure, had produced the potential for their massed building on all available sites, as a routine and autonomous policy, and for their equally unconstrained spread to smaller authorities.

In land terms, the possibility now beckoned of a 'virtuous circle' which could emancipate high blocks from their initial land-shortage context. Their use in exploiting gap-sites and extracting large housing gains from initial sections of redevelopments had begun to create some very substantial slum-cleared areas. These, along with an increasing number of major peripheral sites such as Birmingham's Castle Bromwich Airfield or Dundee's Whitfield, might then themselves wholly or partly be developed with high blocks. To those concerned with housing production, it did not, of course, matter that multi-storey 'site cramming' in the outer suburbs might be seen to conflict with the prevalent architectural and planning view of high blocks: this held that they should be used chiefly in 'high density' inner areas, and always in the designer-controlled context of mixed development. When numbers were the aim, all sites within an active authority's boundaries were viewed on equal terms, and then purely on the basis of their potential yield. 21

Although, in the early 1960s, most provincial cities' high blocks still stood as isolated outcrops, their establishment as an accepted housing pattern in key cities had laid the basis for a lightning spread, with very large projects soon routinely channelled through Housing Committees virtually without discussion. By 1966, Newcastle CBC's Housing Chairman was able to lament, in discussion concerning the Cruddas Park Neighbourhood Centre project, (involving a 20-storey slab block and a shopping centre): 'My Lord Mayor, I am stunned. Here we have a report before us which involves well over £1 million, and much of the discussion has been on £623 for a toilet and £3000 for a police station!' In an uncannily similar vein, the chief architect of a major
Scottish 'package-deal' contractor recollects:

'You'd go along and present the drawings to the Housing Committee - other people would pontificate a bit, then someone would say, "We've got Mr. Bowie from Crudens here, who's going to explain about the scheme." Then I'd say "There are three 20-storey blocks, with 120 three-apartment and 240 four-apartment dwellings", and so on. Then, "Any questions?" "How's it going to be heated?" "That hasn't been decided yet." "Where's the children's play space going to be, Mr. Bowie?" "That'll be designed later." "Anything else?" "No, that'll be all, thank you, Mr. Bowie." Then that would be it through! I used to joke, in Dundee for instance, that there was often far lengthier discussion about rebuilding public lavatories than about doing multi-storeys!'”

So, by the early 1960s, it appeared that the scene was now set for an unrestrained spree of building Modern flats by municipalities up and down the country. Just at this point, however, one last, major obstacle reared its head: a crippling building shortage, caused by a general building boom and overload of the British construction industry. To surmount this hurdle, it would be necessary to mobilise all available resources within the building industry, conservative at the best of times, in a concerted drive for the production of Modern flats. The next chapter will describe the effects of this 1960s building-capacity problem, and the way in which it was overcome.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 4

1 'Memorable years': int. Rogan.


6 Small burghs 'concerned about the rates': int. Cramond. Smaller slum-clearance authorities before 1961-2 also cautious: e.g. Mitcham MBC Phipps Bridge Committee 27-9-1960. 'Hopeless': int. Milefanti, also on all Dorset RDCs all bad except for Sturminster Newton. HLG 49-1444: 1959 correspondence on Dorset: Dorchester RDC had stopped building.


8 Scottish Office Regional Development Division: Gibson, pp. 141-5.

9 'Modernisation of Britain': Finnimore, p. 81.

10 Crossman a maverick: int. Beddoe, Milefanti.


14. Greenwood 'medium weight': int. Beddoe, Milefanti; 'wet flannel': int. former borough Housing Chairman.


17 'It would have been a nightmare': int. Beddoe; also Cramond. Initial local authority welcome: for instance LCC HC presented papers 3-2-1966. Equivalent administrative problems following 1919 Acts subsidy: Morgan, p. 129.


19 Comparative breakdowns of cost of new housing: DOE NI 2271/60 statistics. Over 1967-8 financial year, breakdown of finance between rents, rates and exchequer was: Scottish council housing, 40%/36%/24%; English/Welsh council housing, 76%/6%/18%; Northern Irish council housing, 59%/11%/30%; SSHA, 41%/0%/59%; NIHT, 54%/0%/46%.


21 Walsall redevelopment and housing gain: see for instance HC 15-11-1961 (bring in fit dwellings); HC 14-10-1964 (increase sites' yield just
by doubling height of planned 8-storey blocks). Walsall slum-clearance 'went a long way to solving the housing problem': int. Wood. Castle Bromwich: Dunleavy, p. 278.

22 Cruddas Park, Newcastle CBC 5-1-1966 p. 785 (Cuthbertson). 'You'd go along and present the drawings': int. Bowie.
CHAPTER 5: PACKAGE-DEALERS AND NEGOTIATORS:
HOUSING PRODUCTION AND THE BUILDING BOOM

'The world's built on supply and demand — and, around 1960, the demand for high blocks was there but the supply wasn't!' A. Mitchell

By the beginning of the 1960s, despite rumblings of opposition among designers, all appeared ready for a rapid expansion of Modern housing production throughout Britain. There still persisted discontent among municipalities on the matter of subsidy levels, but this problem, as we saw in the previous chapter, was to be remedied stage-by-stage. So it came as a sudden shock to local authorities in 1960, when the nascent production recovery was hit, with no warning, by a severely damaging shortage of labour and materials, which stemmed from a general national upsurge in building activity. This chapter has a double focus. How was the construction of these new and sometimes unfamiliar types of flats itself organised? And — just as important — how was the additional difficulty of starting this task at a time of severe building shortages overcome?

It will be seen that, while Ministers and some public architects made grandiose rhetorical pronouncements on the 'modernisation of the building industry', the process of negotiating and monitoring of contracts, driven by the realities of local and national housing politics, continued in the background, well out of public view. The municipal officers and the contractors' staffs — including many production-minded architects — worked quietly and effectively, to provide what the largest cities actually wanted: 'package deal' multi-storey blocks and higher production. The construction industry is hardly a natural monopoly. In 1968, near the peak of the housing boom, the top five firms accounted for only 9.3% of gross output in Britain, or 26% within the building contracting sub-sector. It can come as no surprise that the whole-hearted involvement of this conservative and fragmented grouping in a daring national venture such as the 1960s public housing drive was only triggered off by an outside stimulus — the
demand from large municipalities for the building of Modern housing, especially high flats.

But this forceful local pressure for recovery of output took place not in a vacuum, but in an inimical building-industry context of labour and materials shortages. It is therefore first necessary to trace the way in which these shortages compelled those local authorities determined to build many Modern flats, to resort to new contractual and constructional approaches from the early 1960s - most prominent among which were 'package deal' contracting and prefabrication. Over the remainder of the chapter, the mature organisational pattern of 1960s Modern housebuilding in production-minded authorities across Britain will then be set out.

The key argument of this chapter is that the main driving force behind the contractual innovations of the 1960s was the urgent political desire of large urban authorities to launch themselves into multi-storey building as a way out of the 'land trap': their urge to build high, in its turn, attracted large contractors to leap aboard the accelerating bandwagon. This interpretation is the opposite of Dunleavy's claim that it was profit-hungry contractors who pressurised municipalities into undertaking the massed multi-storey building push of the 'sixties. It will be argued in the following pages that, even in the context of the severe building shortages of those years, the great size and power of the cities spearheading the urban housing drive frustrated any faint hope the contractors might have entertained, that they might be able to exploit this specialised demand in order to establish a dominant, or monopoly position. Only on the outer edges of the 1960s housing boom, in the furthest spreading of the net, to recoup initial investment in factories and plant by pulling in more small authorities, was the influence of the contractors exerted on building policy. This thesis argues that, at the most general level, the 'national' structure of decision-making and influence on adoption of high flats was hierarchical, with the large cities at the top. This chapter develops this idea in the particular area of building organisation: here, the
initial demand from large authorities created and supported a complicated network of regional and local relations.

In the organisation of building, it was, above all, the particular demand for high flats which distinguished the 1960s public housing drive from its 'traditional' predecessors of the early 1950s and the interwar years. For this reason, this chapter will not discuss the building of 'traditional' housing or two-storey 1940s/early '50s 'non traditional' housing, nor the history of the postwar building and building supplies industries in general.
COPING WITH THE BUILDING BOOM

The pattern of contractual organisation associated with the 1960s Modern housing drive was given shape by the unexpected challenge of building labour and materials shortages.

During the 1950s, the relatively few municipalities which built high flats on a large scale (these mostly located in London) experienced hardly any difficulty in obtaining selected or fully competitive tenders from local or regional building firms. Virtually all these early high blocks were built in conventional in-situ (loadbearing wall or frame) concrete construction, a method requiring much skilled on-site labour. But even in areas where multi-storey building was proceeding in a locally intensive manner, building capacity did not rear up as a major hurdle. This was hardly surprising: indeed, some foreign examples (such as that of the Hong Kong Housing Authority during the 1980s) demonstrate that a plentiful supply of skilled labour can permit the most vigorous building of high flats exclusively employing in-situ construction.

But by the time a national housing drive, chiefly using Modern flats, was taking shape - around 1960-1 - the situation had taken a dramatic turn for the worse. A general building boom, with accompanying shortages of labour and materials, and increased prices and completion times as firms moved out of local-authority work into more profitable industrial or commercial contracts, had by then suddenly materialised.

This process of overloading was hardly alleviated by the period of financial restraints (the 'Great Squeeze') during 1961. Certainly industrial construction and speculative housebuilding levelled off; but commercial building continued its voracious growth. This had the indirect effect of lengthening the average construction time of a council dwelling from 12 months to 14 months, between mid 1960 and late 1961. In fact, this overload was to continue at least until the introduction of the 'Brown Ban' (on new office building in London) in November 1964. By July 1964, the total volume of building-industry work
in Britain would be 48% higher than six years previously: a mere three days' brick supply would be in hand! "

Of course, local authority building had, in any case, long been looked on by local and regional builders as 'hospital work' to be kept for a rainy day. Therefore the effect of the overloading on municipal housing production was as severe as it was sudden. In the major Lancashire industrial centre of Oldham, for instance, just 100 out of 2,000 local building workers were available for council housebuilding in September 1961: as a result, therefore, annual output had settled at just 300 dwellings - and even that jeopardised by a grave shortage of bricks."

The first response of any municipality whose tender invitations, during a full market, were not answered or met with excessively high quotations, was to look for negotiated contracts. The latter's attraction, from the point of view of the contractor, was partly that they were more profitable, but, much more, that they made certain he would get the job, and so saved trouble and expense. In some places, the efficacy of competition was in practice severely restricted by unofficial agreements or 'rings' between local firms (as was for instance alleged in Birmingham in 1961) or by the stultifying influence of a strong direct labour organisation (DLO). For a major building firm, a rolling municipal housebuilding programme based on negotiated contracts sometimes, at first glance, offered little profit on tender prices, which were always fairly 'thin'. But there was a concealed attraction here, as compared to private-sector contracting: the public-authority practice of staged payments, as work proceeded. From around 1958, some authorities began to move away from this procedure towards delaying the issue of certificates, and thus payment; but most contractors still derived a 'positive cash flow' from this process, which could be re-invested in a land bank as an insurance against the next cyclical downturn in public housebuilding. The official Banwell Committee on contractual procedure (1964) expressed reservations about the spread of negotiated contracts, as did some contractors: it was claimed by some that this represented 'a drift further away from definition, discipline and good practice'. But, during the building
shortages of the early 1960s, negotiated contracts' wider adoption could hardly have been avoided.

The pursuit of negotiated contracts was not, however, simply a result of building-industry overloading. Some output-orientated authorities, particularly outside London, had adopted this approach soon after World War II to assist in streamlining production. For example, Glasgow Corporation had erected many thousands of tenements in the 1940s and 1950s through negotiated contracts with a 'consortium' of local builders and with its own direct labour organisation. The reason that this method was not generally applied to multi-storey developments up to the mid 1950s was, quite simply, the fact that high flats were not needed until then in sufficiently large quantities (other than in the case of the LCC's programme, whose control by architects introduced a different set of constraints). But by the middle of the 1950s, a number of municipalities that wished to start large-scale multi-storey programmes were beginning to seek negotiated repeat contracts with national or local firms, in view of the size and complexity of multi-storey projects; such contracts were very often derived from initial competitive tenders.

In the architectural press, considerable prominence was given in 1953-4 to the LCC's negotiation with Laing of a contract for several 11-storey slab blocks at Picton Street, Camberwell: the periodicals hailed this scheme (supervised by Cleeve Barr, before his move to the Ministry of Education) not only as innovative in reinforced-concrete construction, but as a prototype of negotiated contracting practice, naturally under the strictest architectural control. Undoubtedly this scheme was of constructional significance; but, in contractual and organisational terms, it was only remarkable in the context of the LCC's own old-fashioned practices. A few large provincial authorities such as Birmingham had been negotiating multi-storey contracts since the late 1940s; soon, production-minded London authorities such as Shoreditch also shot ahead of the LCC in this area. Picton Street provides one of the clearest examples of the potential historical distortions arising from the imbalance in articulateness and access to 'national' media
between some groups (such as LCC architects) and others (such as provincial city engineers or contractors' staffs)."

In the early 1960s, however, authorities were beginning to grapple with a general building shortage at the same time as embarking on a nationwide Modern housing drive. So negotiated contracts suddenly became of immediate relevance up and down the country; and the Government, under intense pressure from the big cities, rapidly relaxed existing restraints. In Scotland, DHS had tried for several years, with mixed success, to forbid the use of negotiated contracts in cases where a consultant architect or local-authority architect was already involved, on the basis that competitive tendering to the architect's brief was possible. But, in 1961, contractual restrictions were lifted on the order of the Under-Secretary responsible for public housing, J. Callan Wilson, in order to accommodate Glasgow Corporation's by then urgent wish to begin large-scale building of high flats. In England and Wales, a system of unofficial rationing of negotiated contracts, applying both to towns and to firms, was brought in. The chief beneficiaries, as in the case of the new differential subsidies, were potentially active urban authorities - in this case, those who were trying with little success to attract tenderers for schemes already approved. For example, Preston CBC's Housing Committee, seeking urgently to raise production by half, and make a start on its major Avenham redevelopment, invited bids from 19 contractors in late 1961 for the Avenham CPO No. 1 scheme; however, in the event, only two submitted tenders. To avoid further delay, the Borough Surveyor, E.H. Stazicker, was then allowed by MHLG to negotiate the next stage (Avenham No. 2) with a local firm, J. Turner. "

A further, very significant step beyond negotiation was the 'package-deal' contract, under which the contractor would design as well as construct the scheme. This circumvented not only labour shortages but also lack of professional staff such as quantity surveyors, architects and engineers. A development of this idea which appealed to many authorities was package-deal competition: the use of different contractors' own package-deal designs for quasi-competitive tendering,
on the basis not of a precise architect's brief but of very general local-authority guidelines which steered clear of the field of 'design'. This constituted almost a mirror image of the procedures of those negotiated contracts where an architect's designs were used as the basis for negotiations and briefings. By 1964, 46% of all new public housing in England and Wales (with the exception of LCC and direct labour contracts) was accounted for by negotiated and package-deal contracts; this figure rose to 55% in 1966-8, at the height of the Modern housing boom, falling back again to 28% in 1970.

The response of the public-architectural establishment to the threat posed by the package-deal was predictable: to thrust its head deep into the sand. 'Neither now nor in the future is there a place for the promoter of the standard designed multi-storey block,' thundered R. Woodcock, a senior architect of the Department of Health for Scotland, 'and we should not deviate from the decision to place the onus for design on the local authority architect or consulting architect... this should be stressed in all cases where a local authority have in mind to employ a nominated contractor, whose services should be confined to collaboration on the working details, organisation and building'. Already, in 1957-8, the DHS architects had strenuously opposed an attempt by Edinburgh Corporation to place package-deal contracts, covering up to 18 multi-storey blocks on four sites, with a 'panel' of contractors including Wimpey, Scotcon, Crudens, Laing and the SSHA direct labour force. Ironically, DHS's simultaneous campaign to ban negotiated contracts in cases where a local-authority architect or consultant architect was involved, had had the unintended effect of turning local authorities' attention to the package deal, where this problem would not arise! A similar attitude was displayed by the architects of MHLG: for instance, M.B. Blackshaw, Cleeve Barr's deputy, severely upbraided Stazicker in 1962 for suggesting package-deal competition as a way to circumvent the lack of tenders for Preston's Avenham No. 1 development: it was vital, he asserted, that an architectural brief should be drawn up and issued to all prospective tenderers, in order that like could be compared with like.
In the meanwhile, however, the large contractors were busy devising multi-storey plan-types for 'traditional' in-situ construction. These were intended to be suitable for use in package-deals, but would also be capable of modification to the requirements of any individual local authority. Many contractors produced their own type-designs: for example, Laing's own point blocks were first built in 1960 at Oxford CBC's Blackbird Leys development after winning a package-deal competition against equivalent blocks by Wimpey and Wates, and then rapidly spread, in numerous variants, to many of the firm's contracts in larger cities. Although architectural critics of the 'package deal', then and now, have constantly reiterated, as an assumed fact, that these contractor-designed blocks were both 'repetitive' and 'featureless', the guiding principle behind them was in fact flexibility. The firms were engaged in a continuous balancing act, juggling the demands of individual local authorities for small variations, against their own internal process of development of more efficient and economical designs - all within the constraints of building regulations and Government housing standards.

In 1960, for example, the ambitious Musselburgh-based firm of Crudens appointed its first company architect, George Bowie. One of Bowie's first tasks was to produce type plans for point blocks, based on a layout of six flats on each upper floor. These designs were loosely influenced by Edinburgh Corporation's brief for the company's first multi-storey job, a negotiated contract of 1960 for three 14-storey blocks at Gracemount. In follow-up package-deal contracts in other towns, this general plan-type, and more particular 'generic features', were progressively developed and adapted. For instance, the building-regulation requirement that there should be a minimum external wall area for each flat, was fulfilled by some contractors, such as Wimpey, by 'staggering' the two halves of the building, producing a twin-tower plan. Bowie's staff, on the other hand, set out to achieve a more economical rectangular plan, by setting 'lungs' into the side of the building. The Gracemount blocks, and follow-up contracts of 1960-3 in Dundee and Glasgow, included two on each side of the block. However, in 1964-5, a 'handed' redesign of the six-per-upper-floor block reduced the
lungs to one on each side, cutting thermal loss. But by that time, there was new external pressure on this process, emanating from output-hungry authorities such as Glasgow: 'Along came people looking for bigger blocks. The solution was obvious - make them higher, but also stick two or more together, adjust the planning of the flats for daylight and so on.' (ill. 4) The culmination of this evolution was the Ardler development, Dundee (1964), whose six 17-storey slab blocks, containing a total of 1,788 flats, each comprised three of the 'standard' point blocks strung end-to-end, giving 18 flats on each upper floor! Along with this steady evolution of plan-types, there was a parallel development in Crudens's in-situ concrete constructional designs. Here again, as in the case of the Edinburgh type plans, there was no attempt to 're-invent the wheel' (as often happened in LCC or architectural development group projects): instead, Truscon were initially employed as r.c. engineering subcontractors, while Bowie's own engineering staff built up experience and expertise on multi-storey jobs actually in progress. 

And all the time, alongside this internal development process, there was constant external pressure to introduce small variations of detail and finish on any individual scheme:

'No authority ever came and looked at anything we did and said, "Can we have three of those?" - there were always ifs and buts! Having got yourself a contract your marketing people would tell you, "Here's another local authority, Falkirk want a scheme, why not bash on?" We'd say, "If you can come, you can see the frame coming out of the ground, if not then here's a model, and some approximate costs." Then the authority would say, "We can start in four weeks." We'd say, "Here's the block." The authority would look at it and say, "We do like it, but we'd like the following things, only tiny wee things, like a slightly bigger kitchen and different windows, Mr Bowie - and can we have a clothes drying area inside the block, and a play area on the ground floor?" - and so on, and so on! Also our designers and engineers were getting cleverer and cleverer, so we incorporated improvements. It always annoyed us - every time we got a job, another set of working drawings always had to be done!' 

In the integrated, commercially-directed professional staffs of package-dealing firms such as Wimpey and Crudens, designers truly harnessed themselves to production, at the same time as their counterparts within
Whitfield Central Precinct, Dundee: two 16-storey Crudens slab blocks (built from 1967), each comprising, in modified form, two of the company's original Gracemount-type towers. On the right, the honeycomb layout of the Whitfield Industrialised Phase I (Skarne) scheme, built from 1968.
the LCC tradition were merely talking about doing so while in practice heading in the opposite direction. Although contractors' design work was often under the direction of company architects, the dictates of production always took precedence over any abstract notions of 'architect's design'. Yet there was no repetitive uniformity of practice: a constant stream of suggestions for structural or plan modifications emanated from contractors' engineering and architectural staffs: 'There never really was a standard block!'. At times, large multi-storey package deals became 'far more an engineering problem than an architectural problem - engineering for the foundations, for the roads, for the sewers, for the multi-storey blocks themselves. The architecture, bit by bit, became cosmetics, until a good engineer could say "Could you not move this...?". Suddenly, you'd find your engineers designing your whole block for you!' Of course, these firms' company architects envied the freedom and public prestige of the LCC designers. But they well realised that one could not have it both ways: 'The LCC types were very jealous about the volume of work we were getting, but they couldn't touch us on efficiency!' 

In this account, the identification of the term 'design' in housing with the concerns and skills of LCC-style 'social-reforming artist-scientists', as expressed above all in the phase of multi-storey building which immediately preceded the subject of this account (in other words, the introduction of high blocks in the LCC and elsewhere in the late '40s and early '50s), reflects the success of those architects in defining the term so as to exclude and stigmatise the 'design' activity needed for the phase of routine housing production which followed their own virtuoso efforts. But the conventions of architectural polemic, and the conflict between these groups, should not conceal the fact that the two kinds of 'designing' stood in historical succession, and were thus, in a way, complementary. It was not the job of the architects, engineers and quantity surveyors of Wimpey to design architecturally path-breaking schemes such as Roehampton or Park Hill, any more than it was that of LCC prima-donas to work up standard point blocks into package-deal schemes for twenty assorted boroughs in the West Midlands.
The key to the 'virtuous circle' of package-deal architecture lay in its discipline. The force behind this discipline was provided by the needs of both contractor and client: in the first instance, the need to maximise profits; in the second case, the big cities' need for reliability, punctuality and lack of overspending.

The whole direction of the argument in this account - that the impetus to build high flats emanated not from contractors but from municipalities - means that the contractors' motives in this matter, although of interest, are of subsidiary importance here. Clearly they would not have entered the field of high building if it had not seemed potentially profitable - and, indeed, the 'traditional' in-situ multi-storey blocks of the late 1950s and early 1960s, whether to contractor's or authority's design, were often very profitable to build. 17 During the 1960s, on the other hand, as will be seen below, the contractors were to lose most of the advantages of this 'virtuous circle', as a result of their enthusiasm to enter a new field - prefabricated construction - which would lend itself less readily to requests for minor variations. What is of far greater importance here is the position and motivation of the powerful local authorities in the area of building organisation. Their strength would be amply demonstrated in the way in which they were to be largely protected from the consequences of the overextension of prefabrication: they would be able in most cases simply to repudiate the later stages of 'serial contracts' and leave the contractor to pick up the bill.
PREFABRICATION: LEAPING ON THE BANDWAGON

The most spectacular expression of the search for ways to circumvent the building-industry shortages was the sudden spread of commercially-sponsored prefabrication methods for high flats in the early and mid-1960s. Some were licensed from abroad; most employed large load-bearing precast panel construction. Prominent and early examples were Concrete Ltd's 'Bison', built in hybrid form from 1961 by Glasgow and full 'Wall Frame' form from 1963 by Birmingham and others; Taylor Woodrow-Anglian's licensed Larsen-Nielsen, built from 1963, initially by the LCC; and Camus, built from 1963 by Liverpool. The rapid proliferation of commercial prefabrication methods led Kenneth Campbell to ask in October 1962, at a key Cement and Concrete Association conference intended to synthesise this movement, 'Why, to be extremely rude, are so many firms now leaping on a bandwagon which they have watched pass them for some considerable time?' Many airy pretexts for the spread in prefabrication of multi-storey and other Modern flats were offered at the time by architects, politicians and other articulate groups: cost saving, faster construction and so forth. However, the main cause of the proliferation of prefabricated high blocks in towns across Britain was more matter-of-fact and basic: the impact of the building-industry shortage on an established pressure for construction of a particular building-type. The same problem, and solution, had characterised the earlier phases of large-scale prefabrication, immediately following World War I and World War II, when 'traditional' types of two-storey cottages and (in Scotland) flats were prefabricated and built on suburban sites in large numbers. 16

During the 1950s, in the period of innovation and initiation which falls outside the scope of this account, extensive experimentation in the structural design of high flats, by public and private engineers and architects, had developed a range of techniques to a level where they were more or less ready for large-scale routine reproduction. The focus of this work had been 'no-fines' in-situ construction, which had been developed by the SSHA and Wimpey with the collaboration of Birmingham Corporation, the Building Research Station and DHS Housing Architects.
But, during those years, there had been no concerted experimentation in full-scale precast-concrete prefabrication - a striking contrast with the energetic efforts underway in other countries such as France and the USSR. The lack of activity in this area may have resulted from low wages costs, or from the comparatively low construction cost of the lightly-built brick cottages traditional in England and Wales, which might have diminished the potential attractiveness to contractors of the building supplies industry (with its traditionally higher profit margins), as a potential field for diversification. Certainly, in England, only the LCC experimented to any real extent with precast construction in the early and mid 1950s, and then in a somewhat desultory manner. But even in Glasgow, despite the Corporation's high interwar output of precast-concrete dwellings and wartime experimentation with large-panel ('foam slag') construction, and despite the effect on comparative building costs of the far stricter Scottish building regulations, there was no concerted push for prefabrication of high flats. Instead, it was left to Sam Bunton to plough on almost single-handedly, in continuation of a private research programme he had pursued (with some assistance from DHS and BRS) since World War II. In 1953, Britain's first multi-storey block of loadbearing precast-concrete construction was built to his designs in Clydebank. 19

The pace of innovation had quickened slightly later in the decade when, with continuing encouragement from DHS and, to a lesser extent, MHLG, other contractors began to embark on small experiments with proprietary construction in the multi-storey field. Precast loadbearing large-panel concrete construction of high flats was first introduced to England in 1956 by Reema at Leeds as a main contractor (Ill. 42), and, in 1957, by Concrete Ltd. at Barking as structural subcontractor. These experiments, however, were still on a tiny scale in comparison with even the existing modest volume of multi-storey work. As late as the period 1958-62, loadbearing prefabricated construction accounted for only 5% of all high flats approved over the entire five years - a mere one-fifth of the level which prevailed during the following five years. 20
Around 1959-60, however, this position changed almost overnight. The realisation that a really big multi-storey drive was imminent, and that this forceful municipal demand - this large potential market - was going to coincide with a grave building shortage, cast a sudden and unwelcome spotlight on the lack of concerted research into prefabrication in Britain. In response, contractors started hastily looking abroad - above all to France and Scandinavia, where techniques of fully-developed concrete prefabrication were already available. Reliance on foreign sources for r.c. constructional experience was already an established practice in England: for instance, the development of the box-frame in the late 1940s was to some extent based on the experience of Arup in Scandinavia. This practice now continued into the prefabrication phase. In 1959-60, for instance, Concrete Ltd's managing director Kenneth Wood arranged for one of his senior engineers to be attached to the Danish consulting engineers P.E. Malmstrom, with the aim of devising a patented 'British' variant of large-panel prefabrication broadly based on Larsen-Nielsen construction.

Yet the situation remained very fluid until, and even after, the building industry shortages began really to bite in 1961. This was discovered to its cost by the pioneer of French large-panel concrete prefabrication, Camus, when it launched itself into an intensive British sales-campaign in 1959, with the aim of attracting multi-storey contracts on a 'bulk-order' basis of at least 2,500 dwellings. Camus's initial line of attack was that of wooing experimentation-minded official bodies such as SSHA, DHS and the MHLG Development Group. This campaign, however, met with no success: architects attacked the appearance of the firm's showpiece development at Pantin, outside Paris, as 'dreadful', and DHS Housing Administrators pronounced, in relation to SSHA, that 'it is doubtful if it would be proper for an Exchequer-financed body virtually to set up a private firm in a profitable new line of business in which they could eventually charge monopoly prices'. It was also observed by some delegations that local factors not easily reproducible in Britain, such as availability of cheap Algerian labour, good quality aggregate and cheap river transport, had worked in favour of the French schemes. From 1961, with overheating of the building
industry overheating well in evidence, Camus's British sales-drive was shifted down to the local-authority level. Even here, however, the firm found itself rejected by a succession of cities (including Birmingham, Glasgow, Sheffield, Manchester, Salford and Birkenhead), chiefly because of fears that such a huge 'bulk-order' would give the firm a degree of power over housing policy. Only after two years, in 1963, did Camus finally succeed in securing a major contract, from Liverpool - and then only after entering a licensing agreement with a regional contractor, Unit. 22 (Ils. 43-5)

The failure of Camus's initial sales drive in Britain provided telling evidence that the largest municipalities still held the whip hand in the process of bargaining with the builders, however great the severity of the building shortages and however special the attributes of prefabricated construction. To other contractors thinking of 'leaping on the bandwagon', this early experience would serve as a graphic warning that prefabricated construction of high flats could not in itself confer any significant power, let alone monopoly status, on sponsoring firms, in relation to the housing requirements and demands of the large urban authorities. It was the latter's decisions which had brought a national multi-storey market into being, and which would now shape its further evolution and expansion, as the housing drive gathered pace into the 1960s.
The main French prototype scheme for Camus's first multi-storey projects in Britain, including Liverpool's 22-storey blocks and subsequent contracts by authorities such as Hackney: 54 Avenue de la Liberté, Maisons Alfort, a 21-storey block containing 120 flats.
Liverpool's prototype Camus block, at Classic Road.
Another French prototype for a large-panel 'system' used in Britain, in this instance for 'Tracoba' blocks ordered from 1963 by the SSHA and West Bromwich CBC: six 16-storey slabs and three 23-storey towers at the Cité Pierre Collinet, Meaux.
NEGOTIATING WITH THE CONTRACTORS

How, then, was the nationwide production of multi-storey flats and associated Modern types in fact organised during the 1960s housing boom? In the remainder of this chapter, a hierarchical pattern of relationships, between local-authority clients and contractors up and down the country, will be traced.

The major urban municipalities' urgent wish to embark on high-flat building, in the context of building shortages, had caused them to pursue large negotiated contracts. This new market soon became a battleground between numerous firms competing for the custom of the cities, often by investment in prefabricated construction; and these firms then, in their turn, attempted to diversify by inducing smaller authorities to place contracts. Even at this subsidiary level, however, although contractual pressure often influenced the selection of firm, it less frequently affected broad choices of building type, such as whether to build high blocks.

The big cities pursued three general types of negotiated contract during the 1960s boom. The first was the 'bulk order' for a specified number of dwellings, unrelated to sites. The second was assignment of extension or staged contracts for given sites. Finally, they might pursue negotiation of contracts for individual schemes (package-deal or authority-designed), with little or no guaranteed continuity for individual contractors.

The first of these patterns, the bulk-order, with its minimum required dwelling numbers (ranging from 500 to 2,500) gave the authority the least and the contractor the most power, especially in a context of land shortage. Unsurprisingly, such deals proved very much the exception rather than the rule. The most important early example was, in fact, the contract for 2,486 Camus flats awarded in 1963 by Liverpool to Unit. (IIs. 43-5) Bulk-order contracts could lead both client and contractor into difficulty if there were any hold-ups in site assembly. Indeed, as
will be seen in a later chapter, this was precisely what was to happen in the case of Liverpool. 24

Liverpool's Camus experience was exceptional, and perhaps bound up with the city's fiercely introverted building industry and municipal political life. Most of the other largest cities fed their flat-building programmes more or less piecemeal to a range of contractors, in the form of negotiated repeat contracts for individual sites following a successful initial performance. Only in two other first-rank cities did one contractor attain temporary predominance in high-flat construction: Manchester and Birmingham — both of which had been parties to abortive negotiations with Liverpool in 1961-2 concerning the joint building of Camus blocks. These episodes will be discussed in more detail in Part II of this thesis. Summarised briefly, however, there was in both cases a sudden contractual revolution, in which existing firms were jettisoned as part of a more general attempt to jolt output out of a deep trough.

And in both cases the new dominant contractor in multi-storey building — Laing in Manchester, the major local firm Bryant in Birmingham — attained its status not through a single bulk-order for prefabricated flats, but through a mixture of large-scale in-situ building and supplementary output in prefabricated or modified in-situ concrete construction, built on a range of sites, from slum-clearance gap sites to large outer-suburban windfall sites. In the case of Manchester, Laing erected a range of in-situ-built point blocks, including some in Sectra, a French-licensed accelerated method; blocks designed by Austen Bent's staff were used on some sites, package-deal Laing designs on others. In Birmingham, the City's power over the contractors was used to secure use of its own designs in all cases. Bryant's contribution consisted of in-situ point blocks, and precast-concrete and timber frame low flats and cottages (Bryant Low Rise), all built entirely by its employees; the firm also acted as main contractor for Bison Wall-Frame high blocks. (Ills. 46, 96-101) The nationwide organisation of Concrete Ltd's 'Bison' building drive will be discussed later in this chapter.
Castle Bromwich Airfield (Castle Vale), Area 1, Birmingham: 16-storey Bryant in-situ concrete blocks under construction, c. 1965.
Such a sudden revolution in contractual patterns was not repeated in other cities which had already established contractually balanced multi-storey 'production-lines', which might cushion their programmes from the land crisis. Such cities were Sheffield and Leeds, in neither of which cases had output at any time dropped to 50% of the 1950s maximum. In Sheffield, high flats were shared out fairly evenly between the City's powerful direct labour force, Wimpey and subsidiaries of the London firms Gleeson and Tersons; two-storey house contracts were distributed through YDG's programme of Hallamshire, 5M and other types. Both Womersley and the Housing Development Committee Chairman, Harold Lambert (an LCC-like supporter of design) insisted on use of Departmental type plans. Lambert claims that, in Sheffield, contractors 'couldn't throw their packages around like they could elsewhere!' (Ill. 47) Livett's successor as Leeds's City Architect (from 1960), J. R. Sheridan Shedden, further refined the already established pattern of repeat negotiated contracts. He reduced the number of sites in individual contracts, changed around some of the contractors (by easing out Reema and Shepherd in favour of Wimpey and, on Womersley's recommendation, Tersons); and he phased out Livett's 10-storey block in favour of new, departmentally-designed 12-storey and 17-storey types. (Ills. 48-50) Similar patterns were established for Leeds's increasingly large contracts for YDG and other cottages. A similar contractual balance was found in other major cities, such as Bristol, where Laing, Wimpey and Tersons shared 96% of the 1960s multi-storey programme, and also in second-rank county boroughs such as Coventry and Portsmouth.

Of all the largest authorities, Glasgow Corporation maintained the greatest contractual diversity in its flat-building during the 1960s. This pattern was made possible not only by the city's sheer size, but also, paradoxically, from the power of a vested interest far more entrenched than the likes of Bryant in Birmingham: the Corporation's enormous direct labour organisation (DLO), known as the Housing and Works Department. The wider implications of direct labour operation across Britain will be discussed later in this chapter. Glasgow's, however, constituted a very special case. Although the LCC's DLO was larger by virtue of its repairs and maintenance workforce, Glasgow's was
47 A 'standard' point block type designed by Sheffield's City Architect and built here by Gleeson: Lansdowne development (1963).
Wellington Hill Stage I, Leeds: 1960 perspective by Frank Weemys for Wimpey. This scheme was the first to include the 'standard' 12-storey point blocks designed by Sheridan Shedden's architects. A fourth block was added to the site in 1963-4.
Wellington Hill, living-room of show flat in 'Barncroft Court', the first block to be completed (1962).
Dear Sir,

The Chairman (Councillor K. C. Cohen, LL.B.) and Members of the Housing Committee request the pleasure of your company along with the Chairman of the Housing (or other appropriate) Committee of your Council and their officer, each with one guest, at the official opening by the Lord Mayor of Leeds (Alderman H. Watson, J.P.) of "Barncroft Court", Wellington Hill, Seacroft Estate, Leeds, 10, the first twelve-storey tower block of flats to be completed in the City, at 10.30 a.m. on Monday, the 16th July, 1962.

The flats are sited at the junction of Easterly Road and Wetherby Road and are approached from the City centre by way of North Street, Roundhay Road and Easterly Road or Wetherby Road.

I enclose invitation cards, the third one blank, and would be grateful if you would have the name, etc., of the appropriate officer inserted.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Invitation cards for opening of 'Barncroft Court' in July 1962.
by far the UK's most important in the field of housing construction and new works. Originally founded in 1921, it leapt to predominance through its role in the City's programme under Labour in the late 1930s. From that point, it combined a parochial status characteristic of all DLOs ('like the local builder in a small burgh - so long as you kept them busy they were happy!') with a work-force of several thousand, which constituted in its own right an important aspect of local patronage, alongside low council rents. (Iills. 51, 52) By the end of 1962, the DLO had built 63% of Glasgow Corporation's postwar dwellings, mostly in the 'traditional' form of 3- or 4-storey tenements. However, the urgent political demands for large-scale building of high flats challenged the DLO's complacent hegemony and reduced its overall share of output from 84% in 1962 to 39% by 1967. The resulting contractual pattern during the 1960s was one of fierce competition. Eventually, the DLO carved out a stable niche in the high-flat programme, securing a roughly 23% annual share of multi-storey construction; the remaining 77% was distributed among many regional and national contractors (the share of the largest, Wimpey, being well below that of the DLO). The SSHA added an annual contribution of up to 1,372 dwellings, partly built by its own DLO, partly by contractors. 

Glasgow's direct labour tradition, along with the dramatic process of concentration in the Scottish housebuilding industry since 1914, had two consequences for the Corporation's general contractual policy. The first was an 'almost virginal integrity' in contractual matters, when compared to many other urban areas such as Tyneside, Merseyside, Dundee or the West Midlands. Municipal housebuilding in Glasgow may have suffered from slipshod workmanship, ruinous pilferage and vandalism, unchecked featherbedding and absenteeism, and recurrent overspending scandals, but there was no significant corruption in allocation of contracts. The second consequence was an outright refusal, during the postwar period, to take competitive tenders, and a consequent long-established familiarity with negotiated contracts and expertise in their administration: these were distributed between the DLO and a 'consortium' of local contractors, such as Lawrence and Stuart.
"Now — this is no the twenty-five meenit kind!"

51 The Glasgow DLO at work. Cartoon in staff newspaper by Charlie Baird, plasterer in Maintenance Section (1947).
So the City had from the very beginning sufficient negotiating experience to allow it to maintain the upper hand in managing the 77% of multi-storey output allocated to contractors, by pursuing package deal competition. In Part II we shall trace the detailed organisation of Glasgow's programme, including the masterful negotiating work of Lewis Cross, a senior engineer in the Department of Architecture and Planning. We only need here recapitulate the fundamental principle of package-deal competition: a rigid segregation of the functions of contractor and client, which assigned 'design' to the former, and left the latter free to concentrate on the negotiation and monitoring of the contract.
BUILDING ON THE BOOM

Once the Modern housing construction drive was in progress, the firms which had already invested in factories, casting moulds, establishment of regional offices and so forth, now had to maximise their return by obtaining as many contracts as possible. There were two ways of doing this. The large authorities which had already awarded contracts were likely to remain the most prolific builders of high flats in the future, but the larger the programme the greater the negotiating power that went with it; conversely, as will be explained shortly, smaller towns could more often be drawn into the net through sheer contractual sales pressure, but they represented a peripheral part of the multi-storey market.

The intensity of application of the various mechanisms of contractual promotion, ranging from fringe entertainments at major conferences to informally-agreed areas of influence between firms, depended on the marketing policies of individual companies. Techniques ranged from the cheerful worthiness of Wimpey's Scottish Sales Director, Brigadier Prentice, to a harder-sell approach. It was rarely necessary for national firms to engage in the openly corrupt practices which, in some places, were characteristic of the local industry. One experienced public-sector contractor claimed that this amounted to a 'two-tier industry', under which some contractors spent their time endlessly tied up with impossibly convoluted procedures created by the employing authorities, while the more powerful and influential contractors short-circuited these procedures by getting direct settlements sponsored from above. But, as stated above, the effectiveness of such behind-the-scenes pressure was, in its turn, greatly affected by the size, power and negotiating skill of the client authority.

Certainly, large firms' sales pitch in any individual case was shaped by their evaluation of the technical capacity of the local authority concerned. Major towns were well able to hold their own and compare the merits of different contractors, and to attach irritating conditions, such as structural guarantees, to contracts. Therefore lavish public-
relations presentations, the flying of entire Housing Committees to showpiece schemes in distant towns, or even abroad, became increasingly necessary if firms were to maintain their place in the market.  

It has been asserted, for instance by Dunleavy, that these sales campaigns at times persuaded authorities not just to choose one contractor rather than another, but to build high flats rather than other types of housing. These claims are difficult to evaluate, not least because there is no firm evidence that multi-storey building at any stage consistently appeared to be more profitable than low blocks. The only category of high flats where this seemed to apply was that of the non-prefabricated, completely 'one-off' scheme. Other than in the special case of the LCC, such schemes most often sprang up in isolation, as the setpieces of smaller towns anxious to keep up with their neighbours. Contractors were well aware of the existence of this useful but relatively small sector of the market: 'You'd get places like Buckhaven and Methil, there's only one reason why there are multis there. They'd say, "If Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline can have multis, by God we're gauny have a couple too!"' With middle-sized or smaller towns, the firms could often recognise the influence of their own package-deal types in the 'profiles' (block shape and disposition) of the authorities' design briefs: 'In the design brief, you're shown a nice layout, you'd get, say, Callendar Park, Falkirk, and you'd say, "They've done our profile!" or "They've done Wimpey's profile!" It was a clue as to whose salesmen had done the best job!'  

By the mid 1960s, contractors had absorbed into their marketing campaigns a new factor: the nebulous idea of 'system building'. Here, in the commercial field, it began to perform for contractors the same role, as a public-relations slogan, that it fulfilled in those years for architects and Government Ministers. It should immediately be stressed that contractors' at times eager use of this slogan was not systematically related to the organisation of building or even to the existing pattern of investment in prefabricated-assembly factories and plant: 'I always took the view that there was a time when the Government,
politically, was shouting about low-labour factory-made multi-storey blocks, and they sent a lot of us chasing off to get some damn thing signed up on the Continent. We had to acquire one - but "systems" was and is a marketing vehicle. People would come and say, "We want your system", but they didn't get it! Lots of times when we were busy we got our precast elsewhere than in the Skarne factory. As the thing developed, I'd find us precasting ground-floor slabs in four-storey blocks, say at Whitfield in Dundee, and I'd say "That's rubbish!" Then very soon we said, "Skarne - so what! We won't precast the floors any more, just the walls!" It became delightfully vague, even in the terms of the contracts, where "Skarne" wasn't mentioned! After all... what does it really amount to - just casting large lumps of concrete?" In the marketing field, 'national' contractors' initiatives benefited from the size and spending power of the firms, but this advantage was often offset by the latter's unfamiliarity with local conditions. Such constraints ranged from the strict Scottish building regulations to the 'fearsome' pressures of Merseyside and Dundee, where it was often alleged that closed industrial practices led some outside firms (if they succeeded in breaking in at all) to quit after a couple of contracts. As In the field of large panel prefabrication, firms which had initially enjoyed only mixed success with the largest cities reassured themselves that these projects were simply the 'loss-leaders' which would bring in a deluge of orders; and they attempted to spread their coverage. In the case of Camus, for example, licensing agreements led to late-1960s contracts with medium-sized authorities such as Hackney LBC and the Lanarkshire burghs consortium. (Ill. 53) Reema, having recklessly opened its Scottish factory on the basis of a single 285-dwelling order from Glasgow (Broomloan Road), eventually secured repeat orders from the City and other authorities, notably Lanark County Council. Likewise, Taylor Woodrow-Anglian diversified away from the partial client control of Morris Walk, to clinch more agreeable bulk-orders - for instance, from Sunderland CBC, although this latter was bristling with anti-unemployment clauses inserted to appease local sensitivities. Overall, the proportion of multi-storey output accounted for by prefabrication would eventually be highest in the East Midlands (40% - a statistical freak, in a small region) and, more significantly, Scotland (29%) and the North West of England (27%).


Holly Street development, Hackney LBC - including four 20-storey Camus blocks, part of a bulk order by the Borough, built from 1966 by Fram Higgs Hill.
The potential incompatibility of output and design in second-rank authorities was strikingly illustrated by the difficulties of another Taylor Woodrow-Anglian client, West Ham CBC. West Ham's Borough Architect, T.E. North, was one of the most respected figures in the national municipal-architecture establishment. During the 1950s, he had run the Borough's programme in the LCC manner, insisting on individual designs and competitive tenders in virtually all cases. When, in the early 1960s, it became clear that expanded output would require adoption of a measure of prefabrication, North naturally saw it as his first and foremost duty to ensure firm architectural control. The policy of cities such as Glasgow - to sweep away of the whole apparatus of architect design and briefing in favour of package-deal competition - was quite unacceptable to him.

In 1961, a scheme of two precast-construction 22-storey blocks at Eastwood/Barnwood Roads was assigned to the consultant architects Stillman Eastwick-Field, and negotiations were initiated, predictably, with Laing. As in the case of Picton Street and Oldham, the firm undoubtedly benefited from the project, gaining valuable 'R & D' experience; however, it proved extremely expensive to West Ham, and construction did not start until 1964. After this experience, North now realised that prefabrication would have to proceed on the basis of grouped rather than individual sites. But this would involve repeat use of standard type plans, which made it all the more vital, in his view, that his department should be closely involved in the design process. Impressed by Morris Walk and the alleged architectural flexibility of Larsen-Nielsen, North became determined to secure a Taylor Woodrow-Anglian contract for West Ham: 'That was why he went for Larsen-Nielsen, because we could make an impact. Camus was a terrible, crude design, there was no possibility of changing it, you either took it or left it, whereas with Larsen Nielsen, he felt you could have some aesthetic input!' 

But whereas the size of the LCC had allowed the Council to hold down Taylor Woodrow-Anglian output well below its production capacity, the much smaller size of West Ham and its successor, Newham LBC, and North's
determination that Larsen-Nielsen must be used, conferred on the firm an artificial local monopoly status. This only served to underline the Glasgow view, that designer control of contracting policy might fatally weaken the negotiating position of an authority seeking expanded output. And even the role of North's architects, which had initially dictated the contractual arrangements, was eventually undermined by the sheer size of the Larsen-Nielsen commitment. North's deputy, K. Lund, recollects that 'we had to make so many sites available so quickly - and, because their factory could churn these panels out so fast, we ended up racing and racing to get the sites ready, getting into a kind of merry-go-round!' 

So a large local authority could only seriously trip up if it insisted on narrowing its contractual options for output expansion to a prefabricated bulk order with one particular firm. But the predicament of those contractors that had made themselves reliant on large-panel concrete construction was far more fundamental: they soon found that there would be no sudden breakthrough to profitability. The reason for this was that the economic basis of large-panel prefabrication was fundamentally unsound, because the main source of patronage was concentrated yet uncoordinated - in the hands of a number of powerful authorities, each determined to secure its own individual solution. Many contractors who eagerly launched themselves into the field of prefabrication had 'convinced themselves that the system was far quicker than it really was: they'd been looking through rose-tinted spectacles'. But in the event, most large prefabricated schemes such as Kidbrooke or Thamesmead lost money or barely broke even. These losses resulted both from investments in new factories, and from professional staff costs. Bowie recalls: 'To start off with, precasting something took a tremendous amount of work anyway...the volume of drawing-board staff work for precast is 10 or 15 times that for in-situ, the cost of providing documentation is enormous compared to in-situ - and you always get mistakes! At its maximum in the late 'sixties, the engineering drawing-board staff in our office went up to 250 or 300 people, apportioned between various jobs. But changes multiplied this work even
more - the tiniest of little changes, like changing the edge detailing, spat out all sorts of new requirements for redrawing!"

We will trace below the relative success of firms which combined some prefabrication with a continuing high level of building in in-situ construction. By contrast, the investment of firms who put all their eggs in the prefabrication basket was to prove little more than an expensive gift to the housebuilding drives of the largest and most powerful municipalities.
FLEXIBLE RESPONSE: LAING, WATES, 'BISON', WIMPEY

The three firms which were to make the most profitable and extensive use of prefabrication, Laing, Wates and Concrete Ltd, were well aware of the problems caused by exclusive reliance on contracts in large-panel construction for large authorities. Accordingly, all three maintained a flexible balance with a high level of in-situ work or with contracts from smaller, widely spread authorities. The success of Wimpey was also associated with a continuing reliance on in-situ construction, here the firm's own no-fines method. 30

During the mid-1960s, Laing expanded its high-flat output in many towns, by building point blocks either in Sectra or in more conventional reinforced-concrete construction. For example Southend CBC, a longstanding 'Easiform' client, found itself in sudden need of additional old people's accommodation. In response, Laing provided a series of in-situ 'Storiform' point-blocks to the Borough Architect's design (along with groups of 5M cottages); these blocks so impressed neighbouring Thurrock UDC that they asked if they could also have some. Other significant clients for Sectra and 'traditional' Laing blocks included Manchester, Bristol and the Northern Ireland Housing Trust. 33

But Laing was also worried in case it missed the prefabrication bandwagon. The firm closely followed the Ministry's Development Group Oldham project, and the associated development programme for a supposedly 'non-proprietary' variant of Jespersen (12M). As a result, Laing before long secured the status of nominated contractor to the West Pennine Group - a regional consortium formed in 1964 partly as a result of the Oldham project, partly as a result of the 'progress chasing' activity of P.L. Hughes, head of the MHLG Northern Regional Office. By 1965, quiet persistence brought still further progress: MHLG's 'open system' initiative had been almost absorbed into Laing's marketing machine, and the Principal Regional Officer was openly inviting authorities such as Stockport and Macclesfield to place 12M Jespersen contracts with the firm. In early 1966, Crossman publicly declared, 'You have used John Laing for traditional building - now use him for
industrialised building. The Ministry is backing his system'. But other 12M Jespersen factories were less successful: Livingston in Scotland, for instance, was dogged from the start by problems with suppliers. Eventually, the firm became somewhat disillusioned with its incursion into prefabrication.  

Wates also pursued both prefabrication and in-situ construction. The former was concentrated in the firm's London programme in the London area, the latter in the operations of its Midlands subsidiary. It was only in Greater London and the West Midlands that Wates accounted for more than 15% of all multi-storey public housing starts. In Greater London, Wates's LCC experience gave the firm a head start: some of its LCC schemes incorporated a progressively higher level of prefabrication: full on-site precasting of structural elements was attained at the Warwick Crescent development (1961). (Ill. 7) Not only did the LCC work provide a springboard for contracts with smaller metropolitan-area authorities such as Leyton MBC or Croydon CBC, but it also enabled the firm to emphasise its architectural flexibility. (Ill. 54) This sales-pitch misfired badly, however, in the case of a standard prefabricated point-block built to the designs of Lambeth MBC/LBC. There the tenacity of the Borough Architect, Ted Hollamby, in securing the maximum design freedom for his project architect, George Finch, resulted doubtless in an architectural gain for the Borough, in the form of a series of high blocks with a very distinctive, craggy visual profile, but also in a substantial financial loss for Wates. (Ill. 55)  

In the Black Country, Wates established itself as a trusty mainstay of various medium-sized boroughs (as did Wimpey in Scotland), by constructing in-situ multi-storey blocks and building up a large local workforce. In large and active boroughs such as West Bromwich and Walsall, company-designed projects for 8-storey point-blocks on the Roehampton and Sheppard Fidler model provided a starting point for long-running negotiated programmes. West Bromwich augmented Wates's contribution at the height of its housing drive, in 1964, by placing a 604-dwelling contract with Gilbert-Ash in French 'Tracoba' large-panel construction; this was balanced by the awarding of five 17-storey point-
Bramley Hill, Croydon: 11-storey point block, built 1964 as part of the Wates Croydon III bulk order. The structure of this block was erected, for demonstration purposes, in the exceptionally fast time of ten weeks.
Hurley Road development, Lambeth, seen in 1989. These three 22-storey prefabricated point blocks were built from 1966 as part of a bulk order from Wates. Wates's managing director recalls the heavy loss the company made on this contract: 'Those were very, very complex designs - they should never have been built in system!'
blocks to Wates. A similar move to test the market against Wates in Walsall by Conservative leader Alderman Sir Cliff Tibbits failed, however; one councillor recalls that 'Wates were giving such good service that nobody wanted to leave them!' Wates's only significant excursion into prefabrication in the West Midlands, for point-blocks at Wolverhampton CBC's Heath Town redevelopment, came about largely by accident. Discussions on a pilot Midlands Housing Consortium multi-storey scheme with Bryant broke down, and Wates were brought in to fill the earmarked site quickly yet without drawing labour from other projects.

In the field of out-and-out prefabrication, the firm of Concrete Ltd. was the only contractor to make a very significant nationwide impact. This firm's reputation as the 'Rolls-Royce of Systems' had little to do with the structural attributes of its 'Bison Wall-Frame' prefabrication, although the latter was certainly susceptible to smaller-scale orders than the parent Larsen-Nielsen method. Concrete's advantage derived almost entirely from one simple organisational fact: that the firm was, by origin, a supplier of precast concrete and subcontractor rather than a main contractor. Concrete relentlessly exploited this fact in their marketing - whereas other major structural subcontractors such as Truscon jumped straight from frame-only subcontracts to main contracts. Concrete, rather than treating the local-authority demand for small variations from standard plans as an obstacle, instead turned it to advantage, by offering two potential approaches. Authorities wanting, above all, architectural flexibility, were told that 'Bison' allowed a wide variety of plan variations. In the case of those worried about cost, on the other hand, it was stressed that standard plans were available (mostly worked out by the company's consultant architect Miall Rhys-Davies) and that 'if you stick to the plans in the book, they're the most economical'. Concrete's Scottish Sales Director at the time recollects: 'It was sound commercial sense for us to be seen to be all things to all men... to work with the local people - local builders, local architects. Local allegiance went a long way.' Although the initial spread of 'Bison' and the setting up of regional subsidiaries was made possible by big-city contracts from Birmingham, Glasgow and
others, the firm's subsequent strategy was to avoid blockbusting assaults on individual towns and cities. Instead, in the Wimpey manner, large and small footholds were established up and down the country. As already mentioned, Concrete's sales pitch laid great stress on its divergence from the Camus/Taylor Woodrow-Anglian 'bulk-order' approach, pointing out that developments of only 24 dwellings were possible — although it was emphasised that the smaller the contract, the higher the price of each dwelling. In the event, the locations of 'Bison' multi-storey contracts were to vary from inner-London boroughs and Midlands country towns to the village of Kincardine-on-Forth, Fife, overshadowed by an outcrop of 16-storey point-blocks constructed in 1969 for the County Council.

Concrete's normal practice was to build in conjunction with local main-contractors. This gave it the necessary flexibility to infiltrate an area rapidly: 'any small builder could get a Bison contract!' This practice differed from that of, say, Camus, who licensed local contractors to construct blocks to their designs on an all-in basis. In some regions, Concrete reached main-contractor agreements with a range of local firms. For example, in Greater London and the South-East of England, four principal firms were used: Llewellyn, Farrow, J. M. Jones and Carlton; a few schemes were completely built by Concrete Southern itself. As a general rule for England, the same main contractor would be used for all or most Bison schemes (especially multi-storey flats) built by any one local authority. 43 (I11. 56)

Concrete had three major strongholds - East and West Midlands (where it accounted for 27.2 and 15.8% of multi-storey starts) and Scotland (11.3%). In the West Midlands, Bryant played a special role, as the main contractor covering the vital Birmingham market from 1963, but small local firms were also used to allow flexibility in accepting jobs in smaller towns such as Lichfield. 44 In Scotland, Concrete's regional subsidiary (Concrete Scotland Ltd), when acting as structural subcontractor, either worked on a nominated basis (as in the case of Glasgow, with the DLO and Laidlaw) or as prospective subcontractor to competing main contractors, as in the case of Aberdeen's Seaton scheme.
Detail of Bison deck-access block, Chalkhill Redevelopment Area (Claw F), Brent, built 1968 by Farrow (the Bison contractor allocated to Brent).
in 1972. But Concrete Scotland also often served as main contractor, perhaps as a result of the greater complexity of the structurally superior Scottish variant of Wall-Frame. On occasion Concrete Scotland even went through the motions of competing for a contract against itself, in the guise of a quoting subcontractor! Concrete, along with Reema and others, was originally drawn to build a factory in Central Scotland by the aggressive Glasgow contractual strategy of package-deal competition. It is perhaps indicative of the firm's marketing skill that it was the only one of these prefabricated-construction incomers to succeed in breaking out of Clydeside, to establish a nationwide presence across Scotland. 445

In the early 1960s, Wimpey assiduously tried to secure official recognition as a 'system', by marketing a new dry-lined point-block type, the '1001'. (I11. 57) The prototype '1001' scheme, at Manston Road Allotments, Ramsgate, was completed in 1964. But the firm's no-fines in-situ construction, although it seemed increasingly old-fashioned to some architectural and marketing advocates of 'system building', was in reality also a great asset, in defending Wimpey's existing nationwide coverage against the incursions of prefabrication.

Wimpey's three main selling points were its overall first place in reliability, in the opinion of many authorities, its employment of local semi-skilled labour (with the itinerant regional pouring gangs the only fixed workforce), and its flexibility of layout - although Wimpey's Scottish Region had exceptional success in persuading authorities to accept the standard '1001'. Much of its established strength, not surprisingly, lay in cities that were less than wholehearted about prefabrication - Edinburgh, Bristol, Leeds - and in a wide range of small authorities. Overall, Wimpey built between 20% and 35% of high flats in all areas of Britain outside Greater London (only 2%) and the North-West of England (12%). During the 1960s boom, while the firm lost ground in some existing strongholds such as Coventry, it showed itself eager to compensate by taking on major new commitments. These included Nottingham, where a series of eight point-block contracts was won
between 1963 and 1967, or Hull, where the Housing Committee, anxious to
get the housing drive moving while YDG type-plans were designed, awarded
bulk contracts to Wimpey in 1965-7 for 997 high flats at Orchard Park,
and to local builders in 1963-7 for several thousand cottages to the
City Architect's standardised or adapted designs. 47
In many ways, the most aggressive contractual element in the spread of Modern housing to middling and smaller authorities across the country, was the regional or local building industry. But even here, pressure was usually concerned with the selection of contractor or the type and size of contract, rather than broad issues of building policy - such as whether or not to embark on the building of high flats. Local interests included large contractors in Conservative-controlled or marginal authorities, sometimes connected informally with councillors and officers (for instance, by Masonic links), or local direct labour forces in Labour-controlled municipalities. It could be speculated that the more fragmented or old-fashioned the contractual pattern, the greater the degree of local or regional building industry influence in the area concerned: this may have been particularly true of the South-East of England and (up to 1965) the London area. Lubetkin recalled his experiences in seeking tenders for Tecton's Finsbury multi-storey schemes: 'There were many rings - behind the doors, they were all agreeing who was going to do what!' 

The potential innovativeness of local building enterprise was realised, for instance, in the building policy of Aberdeen Corporation, with its tradition of self-reliance and incorruptibility; here a multi-storey drive was carried through from start to finish almost entirely by local firms. In Stoke-on-Trent, a local consortium prevailed on the Housing Committee to negotiate an initial multi-storey contract with their members rather than national firms: this (and a new national code of practice concerning brickwork construction) then made possible the City's development of a remarkable series of load-bearing brick point blocks, designed by a senior Corporation architect, Neil Hambleton, and erected between 1965 and 1977. In another enterprising local initiative, the Manchester firm Matthews and Mumby in 1963 persuaded the Conservative-controlled Merseyside borough of Crosby MBC to sponsor its own precast-frame 'system', a miniature equivalent of Liverpool's Camus contract which supplied prototype three-storey maisonettes and standard 15-storey point-blocks. Some ambitious regional firms avidly exploited
the 1960s housing drive as a vehicle to acquire a national status: for instance Crudens, who expanded successively from the Edinburgh area to Dundee and Glasgow, then Tyneside and the North of England, and then straight on down to London. However, such a lightning spread required the setting up of subsidiary offices before subcontractors and suppliers would take a firm seriously. This was discovered, for instance, in 1967 by the London contractor Tersons: this firm took on a major multi-storey scheme to be built in the Clydeside burgh of Clydebank, only to run into serious delays because of a local supplier's failure to deliver cladding panels. 43

But this kind of innovative attitude was less characteristic of local building interests than a kind of defensiveness or reactiveness: here, the initiative would only be taken when the local industry perceived itself to be under threat. In Newcastle upon Tyne, after the success of a coalition of interests in unseating T. Dan Smith from the housing chair as a result of the 'Crudens Affair', the housing drive passed mostly into the hands of local contractors. In Brighton, whose multi-storey building was dominated by the local firm Rice, the town's contractors joined forces in 1964 to see off the threat of a proposed Laing 12M Jespersen scheme. 50

In some places, the local firms yielded the multi-storey jobs to national firms, but tried to keep a hold on the cottages and low flats. Elsewhere, the situation was sometimes reversed. In Oldham, a local builder, T. Partington (nominee of a consortium of local firms), was awarded a series of point-block contracts as a counterbalance to Laing's success at St. Mary's. In Norwich, whose traditionally-built high blocks were mostly constructed by local firms, the importation of prefabricated timber houses in 1967 stirred up a hornet's nest: councillor apologists for the local industry asserted that Medway's Philadelphia Lane scheme, for instance, 'looked as if it had come out of the forests of Germany, probably with the leaves on, and had been soaked in the North Sea' before erection. Councillor Len Stevenson recalled that when he mildly attempted to remind one very prominent Council member, during a debate on the Medway contracts, that "Your job is to
consider what the Council needs, not to represent the builders!" - he turned round and nearly punched me in the face!' It was in areas such as East Anglia that most multi-storey building was accounted for by the regional industry: the lowest proportion 'locally' built (18%) was in Scotland. 

In contrast to large regional contractors such as Bryant or Crudens, smaller local firms were generally not able to cope either with multi-storey or big non-multi-storey contracts. There were exceptions - for instance in Edinburgh, with its insular building industry. Here a small local builder and Dean of Guild Court member, A.R. ('Sandy') McLeod of W. Arnott McLeod & Co., contrived to persuade the Housing Committee to allocate him a miniscule gap-site on the Muirhouse II development, previously earmarked for a small Wimpey point-block. On this site, in 1963-4, at considerable cost but no great speed, he built the City's highest multi-storey block: the 23-storey Martello Court. 

Open corruption in selection of contractors, although most imprecisely related to broad questions of building type (the key question for this account), was more common in a local or regional context than in the case of the national industry: it emerged publicly, for instance, in the behaviour of some firms' representatives at the annual Scottish National Housing and Town Planning Conference at Peebles: 'I've seen Conveners of Housing Committees almost crawling up the stairs at night, being stroked and patted on the head by builders!' These characteristics became more pronounced still at the vital level of subcontractor and supplier level: for all schemes, even if outwardly controlled by reputable contractors and architects, were dependent to some extent on an intricate and informal local supporting network. 

The complexities and irregularities of local subcontractual relations were soon discovered, for instance, by the young, LCC-trained job architect of a multi-storey redevelopment scheme which was assigned by a borough in the North-East of England to a prominent firm of consultant architects in the early 1960s. The young architect's suspicions were initially aroused by the unforthcoming behaviour of key officers, such
Muirhouse Phase II development, Edinburgh, seen in 1989. From left to right: two 11-storey slab blocks built from 1960 by Scotcon; a 23-storey point block (Martello Court) built from 1962 by W. Arnott McLeod; two 15-storey point blocks and two 9-storey slab blocks built from 1960 by Wimpey. In the foreground are tenements of the 1950s. The Muirhouse II scheme was one of the largest of Edinburgh’s prefab-site redevelopments.
as the Borough Engineer ('my first perception was that he was acting oddly - I thought it was just he was a dour Northerner... then he said he'd been told to keep off by the Housing Committee') and the Borough Engineer's chief assistant architect ('an almost retired guy who used to come in - he had an alcohol problem'). But it was only when the main contractor, a thoroughly respectable national firm, was appointed and selection of suppliers and subcontractors began, that the job architect began to fully grasp the all-pervasiveness of factionalism and petty corruption within the Council. During one Housing Committee meeting, for example, at which the Chairman forced through a sub-contract for television supply following a £1,000 bribe from an interested party, 'I got a message smuggled into my hand that I had to see the Mayor in his parlour afterwards. He had fallen out with the rest of the Labour Group and had been excluded from the Housing Committee. So I was escorted along to the parlour, sat down, and out came a bottle of whisky and tumblers. Then, Glug! Glug! Glug! "How're you doing there?", one or two pleasantries, and down to business! The Mayor wanted one make of paint specified, and if I did so this firm would supply free for the painting of an old folks' home with which he was associated. There was a charity involved, and so forth - he was really laying it on, although it was "nothing to do with me, mind!" I refused - the matter had already been dealt with. "But couldn't you see your way...?", then more Glug! Glug! and the Mayor's car was waiting to take me to the station - which was only a couple of street-blocks away! But on site, it's very difficult for a young job architect to keep tabs, with paint slopping over tins - so, at the end of the day, I really don't know what paint they did in fact use.'
BUILDING LABOUR AND DIRECT LABOUR

If the building industry was only involved in the propagation of Modern housing patterns in a strictly ancillary role, it is difficult to trace any significant involvement whatever in this process on the part of building labour. Some might go so far as to claim that a move to complex high buildings often constructed by national firms and in prefabricated, supposedly mass-produced form, might even have diminished the role of labour further, by causing 'deskilling' of the building labour force - especially considering that the end of the multi-storey boom, around 1970, coincided with widespread militancy on many sites. But there is no direct evidence to support any such extreme claim: even in the case of the prefabricated schemes of the mid-1960s, architectural theories of mass-production turned out to be largely empty rhetoric in the face of the municipal demand for limitless variation of supposedly 'standardised' package-deal schemes.  

But this is not for a moment to deny that, during the grave building-industry shortages of the early 1960s, the large contractors well appreciated the value of appeasing their workforce. For instance, some firms consulted the trade-unions on introduction of prefabrication, and a national agreement was reached that precasting factory workers should receive building-industry rates of pay. In certain Labour Party strongholds, such as South Wales and the North East of England, the power of the building trade-unions over conditions and pay levels was reinforced through initiatives orchestrated with the local authorities. These might stipulate, for example, engagement of given numbers of local workers or apprentices. Ironically, there is evidence that national firms could accommodate such restrictive conditions as these more easily than could the local industry. In other notorious areas, such as Merseyside, or that 'Chicago of the North', the City of Dundee, it was claimed by some that building labour eagerly involved itself in local closed building practices and corrupt deals (such as collaboration in the persecution and exclusion of 'outside' firms, or in building-materials and subcontracting rackets). But such trade-union or
unofficial workforce activity, however powerful, was not relevant to the subject of this thesis: the broad direction of building policy.  

In only one area did building labour exert indirect influence on the general types of housing erected: the field of direct labour contracting. In some cases, the attitudes and activities of powerful municipal direct labour organisations acted as an intermittent brake on radical organisational and constructional innovations in housebuilding: such as a wholesale move to multi-storey building.

Although relatively few DLOs even remotely approached the scale of the two 'giants', the forces of Glasgow Corporation and the LCC, such organisations did exert a strong influence on building policy in many towns, Labour-controlled or not. In postwar multi-storey building, DLOs accounted for a significant percentage of output in Scotland, Yorkshire and Humberside, the North-West and Greater London (in each case, between 8% and 16%). Many Scottish large burghs and counties were able, with relatively little Government interference, to maintain very strong DLOs. In England, Henry Brooke, when Minister of Housing, pursued a dogged campaign against them: between 1959 and 1963, MHLG attempted to force municipalities to put at least one in every three contracts out to tender. But this utterly failed to get to the root of the problem: where a DLO tendered in open competition, many firms, fearing local-authority favouritism, would not bother to submit quotations, and prices thus remained artificially high. The LCC's DLO was much the biggest in England, but its new-building programme was rather small in relation to its size (around 600 dwellings annually). The other principal DLO to steer away from new construction was that of Leeds, which was entrusted with the bulk of an energetic terraced-house improvement drive started by Karl Cohen in the late 1950s.

The largest and best established DLOs were all associated with prolonged Labour Party control of the municipalities concerned. This was shown by the fluctuation in the fortunes of Liverpool's force, which only flourished for the brief period of Eric Heffer's Works Committee chairmanship. In North of England cities such as Salford or Manchester
or London-area authorities such as Bermondsey MBC or West Ham CBC, an
entrenched DLO built a high proportion of council housing, and often
acted as a powerful brake on involvement of national firms in the
programme, or innovative policies such as prefabrication and high flats.

Under a competently run DLO, the chief management task, or problem, took
the form of a balancing act: between efficiency on the one hand, and
continuity of employment on the other. For this reason, it was not
advisable to take on large contracts at irregular intervals: very often,
in the absence of profit-motivated rigorous management (including the
ability to hire and fire as necessary), massive DLO 'flagship projects'
got out of hand, resulting in serious delays and overspending. A
guaranteed succession of smaller jobs, exactly tailored to the workforce
level, was far preferable. This very well suited the housing conditions
of many direct labour strongholds - metropolitan boroughs such as
Bermondsey, which could only carry out redevelopment in relatively small
sections, or Scottish county councils, with their piecemeal village
slum-clearance programmes. (I11. 59) There were, however, adventurous
exceptions to this worthy but lacklustre rule. Perhaps the most
prominent in this category was Glasgow's gigantic new-works DLO, always
a law unto itself. Glasgow's force, as a separate department, saw
itself as duty-bound to keep up with the times; but, lacking managerial
discipline, it was fascinated to an unhealthy degree with gimmicky or
politically showy gestures. There were periodical spending sprees, in
which costly plant such as precasting factories and tower cranes might
be acquired on the merest whim, and just as quickly discarded once their
novelty value had worn off. The same applied, to some extent, to the
SSHA's DLO, both before and after the appointment of Buteux: the force
prided itself on its pioneering role in no-fines building, and was,
indeed, fairly innovative in general constructional engineering matters.
However, its organisational effectiveness was questioned by observers:
Edinburgh's former Housing Committee Chairman, Pat Rogan (himself a
bricklayer), blasted it as a 'cemetery' for second-rate workers. 60
Bermondsey MBC's Cranham Road/Parfitt Road development, erected from 1963. Virtually the whole of Bermondsey's vigorous slum-clearance housing drive was built by direct labour.
For a progressive DLO to avoid disaster, it had to innovate and build in a measured and cautious manner, not unlike a private company such as Laing. The paradigm of this approach was 'EDLO': the DLO of Edmonton MBC and (from 1965 to 1971) Enfield LBC. EDLO, the longest established force in England and Wales, had since 1925 carried out all building work for Edmonton, including construction of some 10,000 dwellings. After World War II, under the enthusiastic encouragement of successive Housing Chairmen, Tommy Joyce and Eric Smythe, and the skilful management of the Borough Architect, Tom Wilkinson, the organisation launched itself vigorously into an increasingly ambitious multi-storey building drive. In the 1960s EDLO evolved, in collaboration with the Building Research Station, its own technique of battery-cast prefabricated construction. Following the successful erection (from 1963) of a prototype 18-storey block at Angel Road South, the organisation was expanded by 50% under Enfield LBC. It then constructed in Lower Edmonton a succession of chequer-patterned battery-cast towers, culminating in the gigantic Edmonton Green redevelopment, which comprised three 26-storey slab blocks and shopping centre. In Enfield's programme, EDLO coexisted with Wates and a local contractor; but Smythe saw the London Housing Consortium North Group as a 'predator' and refused to join. After the Conservative victory in the 1968 municipal election, however, the multi-storey programme was discontinued. Soon afterwards, in 1971, EDLO was closed down, both for party political reasons and also because of the very wholeheartedness with which it had embraced the building of high flats. 81 (Ilvs. 38, 39, 60, 136)

To summarise: with the occasional distinguished exception, such as EDLO or Sheffield CBC's force, most DLOs in multi-storey building municipalities, if they were of any influence at all, in the terms of the subject of this thesis, exerted a negative effect. They resembled local contractors in their hostility to outside firms, their preoccupation with programme continuity, and their defensive or erratic response to radical changes, as exemplified above all in the political demand for large-scale production of Modern flats.
Stage I of EDLO's Edmonton Green redevelopment (three 26-storey blocks and shopping centre) seen under construction in 1968.
FOOTNOTES:  CHAPTER 5

1 'The world's built': int. Mitchell.

2 Dunleavy, p. 16.

3 Dunleavy argument that contractors pressured authorities: ibid., p. 133.

4 Hong Kong building: int. Ko; Annual Reports of Hong Kong Housing Authority.

5 Building boom: In first quarter of 1961, activity 10% above corresponding quarter of 1960; also CHAC 8-4-1960 (Brooke, Womersley); CHAC 6-1-1961 (Crocker and Minister); LCC HC 11-10-1961 presented papers.


9 Negotiated contracts for high blocks: Dunleavy, p. 261 (Birmingham from 1949); Shoreditch MBC HC 28-1-54 (by W. Lawrence from 1954, as at Geffrye Estate Blocks 5, 6); SRO DD6-1321 13-11-1957 meeting (Edinburgh, 1957 proposal for 14 negotiated blocks on various sites); B 28-2-1958 p. 398 (Sheffield, Tersons from 1958); SRO DD6-1326 10-5-57 DHS-Glasgow meeting (debate on Glasgow DLO negotiation for Hutchesontown B).

11 Circumvent professional staff shortages: for instance Lanark CC Executive Sub. 8-9-1961, on shortage of engineering staff. Proportion of English & Welsh public housing accounted for by negotiated and package-deal contracts: Dunleavy, p. 24 (derived from DoE files).


15 'No authority': int. Bowie.

16 'There never really was...' 'Far more an engineering...' 'Very jealous': int. Bowie.

17 Traditionally-built high blocks of c1960 very profitable: int Lord.

18 'Why, to be extremely rude': K. Campbell, HFF p. 136. Airy pretexts, such as cost: W. Reiners, D. Bishop, B 27-4-1962; but see Cleeve Barr, HR 9-10-1963 p. 158.


21 Concrete Ltd. and Denmark: int. Mitchell; HFF, p. 89 (K. Wood).
22: DHS, Camus and SSHA: SRO DD6-2201 24-9-1959 Camus-SSHA letter, 15-1-1960 note by Paisley Burgh Engineer, 22-4-1960 note to SSHA, 4-7-1961 note, 27-7-1961 note from MHLG. Local factors: int. Gilmour. Camus’s main UK consultants (engineering and marketing) were the influential engineering firm W.V. Zinn. Rejection of Camus 'bulk-order' by big cities: Dunleavy pp. 72-3; Salford refusal, int. C Robertson (Camus demanded too big an order).

23 For interpretation of nationwide contractual patterns which belittles the chronological and hierarchical aspects of spread, by equating the smallest and largest authorities, see Dunleavy's tendentious statistical argument, pp. 129-133 - a case of democracy carried to unusual extremes.


27 'Small builder': int. Mabon; see also Glasgow Housing Department Review of Operations 1919-47, pp. 21-2.


30 Large towns able to compare and contrast: int. Winn. Eastbourne GBC wore down opposition of Concrete and Llewellyn and won a 10-year guarantee for point-block at Langney Village: HC 10-7-1963 pp. 254-5, 14-8-1963, p. 328. Example of PR marketing: in the case of Coatbridge BC, all multi-storey developments were preceded by direct, competitive approaches from contractors, or by film shows and visits: HC 13-2-1964 (Leggat); 18-3-1964, 4-1964, 12-1965, 1-1966, 3-2-1966 (Crudens); 7-1965, 5-6-1965 (Wimpey); 2-12-1965, 24-3-1966, 7-4-1966 (Camus).

31 Influence of sales campaigns: Dunleavy, pp. 129-33. 'Buckhaven and Methil', 'In the design brief': int. Bowie.


35 'That's why we went...': int. Lund.

36 'We had to make...': int. Lund, Edwards. Claim that West Ham multi-storey policy was instance of 'contractual pressure', Dunleavy, pp. 205-254.

37 'Convinced themselves': int. Lord. 'To start off with': int. Bowie.

38 Most profitable and extensive use: Dunleavy, p. 66.

39 Southend: use of Easiform since 1949, Team Spirit May 1967; 5M: HC 12-6-1964; Laing tenders for mixed developments: HC 9-4-1965, 11-6-1965, 16-9-1965; then Wates 12-7-1968. Thurrock Estates Committee 8-7-1966; Laing at Smethwick Team Spirit March 1966 after Council distanced itself from Bryant (HC 4-3-1963, General Purposes Committee 19-2-1963 on Alderman Morris resignation); also Blackburn bulk order of three blocks a year for five years (conventional then Sectra then 12M Jespersen), Estates Committee 17-6-1963.


41 Wates in London in 1950s: see also Galway St, ABN 17-8-1960, p. 217. Croydon CBC made three bulk orders for part-prefabricated 11-storey point blocks: HC 6-2-1964 for Wates pressure for extension. Int. Lord: Hollamby was an 'awkward b...... those were very very complex designs, they should never have been built in system!' Some non-prefabricated schemes still profitable, such as Brentford Waterworks, Hounslow: int. Lord. Wates site factories: OAP October 1965 pp. 1452-7.


44 'Any small builder': int. Smyth. Four Bison firms: Eastbourne CBC HC 12-12-1962 p. 685 - Farrow used for Islington and Brent, Jones for Greenwich, Concrete Southern for Tower Hamlets.

45 W. Midlands flexibility, small firms: the first Bryant Bison blocks, at Hurcott Road, Kidderminster, built April-November 1963, won an immediate Birmingham order for a serial contract, obliging Bryant on Dec. 6th. to refuse Kidderminster's invitation for repeats at Hoo Brook; but 3 days earlier, through a small local main contractor, J.R. Deacon, Concrete accepted from Lichfield MBC a contract for one 8-storey block: Kidderminster HC 11-10-62, 29-8-63, 6-12-63; Lichfield HC 3-12-63. Even Bryant more flexible to smaller towns once Birmingham programme well established: for Rugby MBC's Clifton Road scheme, a gap in Concrete (Northern)'s production schedule in November 1966 enabled Bryant to cut its tender by 3%, securing MHLG loan consent: Rugby HC 5-7-66.


48 Local influence of Freemasons: many town halls have a special lodge. For instance, in Edinburgh, Lodge Edinburgh Defensive Band, No. 151, has been closely linked to the Town Council since the 18th century, and the Lord Provost has frequently been an office-bearer. 'Many rings': int. Lubetkin.


53 I've seen Conveners': int. Theurer.


57 National statistics on DLOs: Building by Direct Labour, W. S. Hilton, 1954. This book canvassed 661 DLOs (five-sixths of national total). Glasgow and LCC had 11,867 out of 50,208-worker national total; only 10 forces had more than 500 workers each. DL share of building industry output grew from 1.75% to 6.25% of output between 1907 and 1946. Scottish county councils' strong DLOs: eg Fife Council 26-7-1956 on visit to see Ayrshire DLO.

58 Brooke vendetta against DLOs: Camberwell Planning Committee 15-6-1960 (September 1959 circular, relaxed 27-3-1963 and formally abolished by Circular 50-65). Firms would not quote against DLOs: int. Lord. DLO favouritism: Hammersmith MBC HTPC 9-1-1963 (at Mardale Street, Borough Engineer put in bid lower than lowest tenderer after tenders opened), Battersea MBC Works Committee 26-11-1962 (at Battersea High Street South, accepted third lowest tender from DLO to avoid redundancies).

59 Liverpool DLO: int. Amos, Heffer, Sefton. Powerful DLOs: West Ham DLO pressure against TWA, int. Lund; Bermondsey built virtually all its


61: EDLO: int. Smythe passim; Edmonton HBC 10-11-1959 (resist Brooke curbs); 11-6-1963 (Angel Road); 14-4-1964 (expand production); Enfield LBC HC 14-7-1965 (26% of 1965-6, 42% of 1966-7 programme would be DLO-built); HC 22-3-1968 (on 'profit' of 4.24% on first Enfield projects); January 1971, Building Manager's Report on EDLO; 5-3-1971, Report on Direct Labour Capital Building Department (high quality and 4% average savings on contract prices); Municipal Engineering 8-10-1971, pp. 1880-1; Edmonton Labour Party, 'Building our Own Future' (1971 electoral pamphlet). LHC North Group as 'predator': int. Smythe.