

Urban Landscapes

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Cities are at the centre of politics in Britain today. More than eighty per cent of the UK population live in cities and their suburban hinterlands. Around ninety per cent of GDP and employment is based in urban locations.ⁱ New Labour has made the regeneration of urban spaces a key plank of their mission to 'modernise' Britain. At the core of this is the goal of placing Britain's cities on the brink of an 'urban renaissance'. In February 2005, John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, claimed that significant improvements have already been made to UK cities:

After many decades of industrial change and economic restructuring, many of our larger urban areas have begun to show substantial progress – underpinned by the long period of economic stability, low unemployment and low inflation from our policies. There's great new architecture, expressing a new confidence, and people are coming back to the city centres.ⁱⁱ

As soon as they were elected in 1997 the New Labour government set up an Urban Task Force under the architect Richard Rogers.ⁱⁱⁱ Its mission statement read:

The Urban Task Force will identify causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions for bringing people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods. It will establish a vision for urban regeneration founded on the principles of design excellence, social well-being and environmental responsibility *within a viable economic and legislative framework.*^{iv}

Laudable aims about an improved built, social and natural environment are therefore made dependent on the right economic situation. Immediately, the suspicion arises that for all the talk about Urban Task Forces, New Labour's

rhetoric disguises a quite different agenda. It forms part of New Labour's more general appeal to a neo-liberal conception of social justice, one couched in a rhetoric of social cohesion and social inclusion through paid work. This utilises the symbols of communities, culture and 'social capital' as a way of managing but not reversing the gnawing realities of acute class polarisation and naked accumulation. We argue that New Labour's approach to the city is shot through with all the contradictions that mark their broader project. At the heart of this is a historical contradiction between planning for social need and competitive accumulation, which finds its most marked expression in the urban spaces where most of British society lives and works.

Communities and Capitalism

New Labour inherited from the Tories an approach to urban regeneration premised on competition, culture and consumption. To this triumvirate New Labour added 'community'. Communities, based on local neighbourhoods, are for New Labour the basic building blocks of social order and cohesion. In contrast to Thatcherite New Right politics, for Third Way politics the state and capital undertake to enter a 'partnership' with communities as an ethically pragmatic route to 'social justice'. For New Labour 'community' is narrowly conceived as a self-regulating organism overseen by volunteer 'community leaders'. There is no place for struggles from below or any sense of 'communities of resistance'.^v As the Urban Task Force put it:

Persuading people and organisations to care for their urban environment is partly a matter of re-awakening civic pride. Community involvement needs to be supported by strong enforcement action to deal with vandalism, graffiti, intimidation, noise pollution and other anti-social behaviour.^{vi}

In making social order central to the Third Way project, communitarianism plays an important moral role in adjusting the individual to the needs of neo-liberal capitalism.^{vii} Instead of relying on reforms being delivered by planning professionals, individuals can overcome the atomisation of market relations through acquiring 'social capital' for themselves by developing a strong sense

of cultural belonging, civic responsibility and mutual cooperation through localised networks.^{viii} There is strong nostalgic appeal in such visions for a lost golden age of 'respectable' working class communities. In so far as these ever existed they tended to be organised around the routines of the local workplaces that dominated the area. Most of these have gone.

Into this situation, 'communities' are given walk-on parts in support of the leading role played by the voluntary sector and private business. For John Prescott, the public-private initiatives that have been imposed on working class areas are at last giving them a voice and acting as 'nurseries of democracy':

Already more than a million people have become actively engaged in their communities. In the past, these people thought that local decision making was not for them. They often felt distant and unheard by the people in power. But now they are helping to shape the place where they live. Programmes such as local strategic partnerships, Sure Start, and the New Deal for Communities are nurseries for democracy ... They've unlocked huge untapped energy and experience – giving people more influence over the decisions which matter to their community.^{ix}

However, far from the cosy image of a stable site of employment, democracy and community identity, Third Way politics aims to expose workers to the new instabilities and cut-throat realities of global neo-liberalism. Here the contradiction is intensified between architectural design and physical appearance, and overcoming social and economic exclusion through 'neighbourhood renewal'.^x This can only be resolved by a voluntarist emphasis on the willingness of 'communities' themselves to follow the lead of engaged local councillors and tend to the urban fabric of streets, parks and other in-between public spaces.

New Labour's rhetoric about community is yet another counsel of despair. Those sections of the working class worst hit by decades of capitalist restructuring are to somehow pull themselves out of the circumstances they

find themselves mired in. New Labour moralism about individual responsibilities and obligations creates an insoluble paradox – the moral rhetoric about community is invoked precisely for those communities most damaged by capital and reviled by the state.^{xi} Even the term ‘community’ itself is suspect. Community has been made to bear all manner of ideological inflections from the ‘community charge’ to ‘care in the community’. Although it is always seen in a positive light, community is an ‘essentially contested concept’ where the same word can take on a wide variety of ideological meanings.^{xii} For instance, in the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton riots the official report by Lord Scarman seamlessly drifted between at least seven different meanings of ‘community’: as a geographical area; as the state; as ethnic group; as ‘silent majority’; as hosts; as interest groups; and as informal networks.^{xiii} A constant but barely noticeable movement goes on between these different and often contradictory meanings, particularly between the state as the community’s rational face and the street as the community’s irrational face. Despite the calls by socialists for a renewed sense of ‘community’, in important respects ‘community’ already belongs to capital.^{xiv} Community is a category usually reserved by policy-makers for the poorest neighbourhoods. Typically, these are cast in terms of ‘social pathology’, where the poor are blamed for their own predicament. In this way the basis of inequalities as intrinsic to the structures of capitalism can be neatly side-stepped. Frozen in the form of classless ‘community’ action, working class activity becomes the subject of reform experts whose object is to bleed dry the class content of urban movements.^{xv} ‘When territorial working class community groups arise there is a set of officers and councillors, in a sense waiting for them, to whom the community group is of vital relevance and who have their own preconceptions which they will bring to bear on its activities’.^{xvi} Neither *the city* nor *the community* form the unified category imagined in the ‘progressive’ alliance of Town Planners and Labour councils as somehow operating beyond the class dynamics that they embody. In the marketing guise of corporate responsibility giant multinationals mobilise the self-same rhetoric of community in defence of their own interests. Tesco, for instance, in its battle to deregulate ‘community pharmacies’ argued that their own in-store pharmacies are also ‘community pharmacies’ since Tesco themselves

constitute a 'community'!^{xvii}

Community-friendly urban design fills up a vacuum created by the absence of sustained urban regeneration and widespread prosperity. Although similar terms were used in Tory urban policy a quarter of a century ago,^{xviii} good design in prestige projects is assumed to be a stamp of social progress and urban renewal. Of course, at the heart of this are the design and planning professionals and private developers, with or without the participation of the community in whose name decisions are made. While we would not want to reify or privilege 'communities' as somehow possessing complete self-knowledge of their own predicament, 'quality' design solutions are provided by private consultants who have little territorial or social connection to the working class whose everyday space they aim to govern by managing the appearance of the urban environment. Instead, we would propose a more active politics of the city as growing out of the struggles not only to protect local services and defend jobs but to connect these to wider questions of the state and capitalism. This avoids two problems. On one side, those that see New Labour's urban turn agnostically as opening a new 'articulation', or relationship, between the state and civil society, where 'urban renaissance' is 'not in itself good or bad, but it is not neutral either'.^{xix} Here, a more positive engagement with New Labour's ambiguous advocacy of 'sustainable communities' is seen as a viable option. On the other side, there are those that see the 'urban renaissance' in terms of anti-Modernist design values. Here the post-war reconstruction of British cities was a brutalist failure of architectural ideology: 'the root of all this was the dominance of modernist ideology among the architectural elite'.^{xx}

It was less ideology, Modernist or otherwise, that produced the crisis of mass housing for the working class. More relevant is the role of urban planning in different stages in the development of capitalism. From Merseyside, Middlesbrough and Dundee in the UK to Ireland's beacon of modernity in the Ballymun estate in Dublin^{xxi}, the post-war creation of deracinated housing estates, tower blocks and New Towns was an orderly reformist response to the 'slash and burn' approach to clearing inner city slums, itself made

necessary by the shift from liberal capitalism to state capitalism. Then, the construction of the urban landscape was integral to the wider programme of national accumulation under direct state supervision and management. In the current restructuring, urban planning has to face the contradictory demands of neo-liberal capitalism, in which the pivotal element is reconciling economic competitiveness and social cohesion. Its importance and centrality to New Labour's urban renaissance programme should not be underestimated. Thus, the launch in 1998 of the National Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (in England) was about combining area specific programmes for 'zones' as in Education Action Zones, Health Action Zones, with New Deal programmes, which are about tackling 'worklessness' and increasing labour force participation. New Labour social policies and area-based programmes are premised on local labour control and the fragmentation and disciplining of labour in the context of a residualised labour market. There is a constant emphasis on the need to include disadvantaged areas in the drive to enhance national competitiveness on the basis that Social Inclusion realise greater economic gains for the UK economy. Assorted area-based strategies and public-private partnerships and local based regeneration programmes – all involving greater market input – are part of the neo-liberalisation of the UK state and economy. Social exclusion and a lack of social cohesion in run-down inner city areas and peripheral estates are now regarded as a source of economic inefficiency, hindering economic competitiveness and flexibility.

Planning and Profit

Urban planners have often been cast in a heroic role, protecting the public from shoddy contractors and ameliorating the short-term drive for profit by speculators. Many socialists seem to share this rose-tinted view of planners who are 'charged in the main with regulating and alleviating the worst excesses which occur when you build for short term profit'.^{xxii} Planning the city has been skewed historically by the undemocratic practices of Town Planning. Consolidated by the 1947 Town Planning Act, Town Planning emerged as a profession in Britain, as elsewhere, precisely in order to mediate the contradiction between the social need for liveable spaces and capital's need

for spatial concentrations of labour power. As such Town Planning became the preserve of state-sanctioned technical experts. As a de-politicised and classless realm urban planning supported an ideology of spatial determinism, where antagonistic social relations could be tethered by how people are arranged in space. For instance, the dominant response to the inner city riots in Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side in 1981 and Handsworth and Broadwater Farm in 1985 was that discontent could be managed by better 'design solutions' to control the social problems occurring within urban space. Urban space is treated in an abstract, neutral way, with the overall goal to create an urban order divorced from class content. For some on the left, the problem with Town Planning was that it was not sufficiently socialist. Labour-controlled councils would remedy this lack of democracy by ensuring some measure of community involvement. New Labour are able to mobilise such rhetoric about a fall from a golden age of planning to encourage communities to identify with new partnership arrangements with private developers. As Prescott puts it:

Decades ago people were ambitious about planning. It meant New Towns, Garden Cities, clearing slums, creating new communities ... But over a period of time, planning became inefficient and ossified. It failed to see the connections between planning and the wider needs of the community. And it became tied up in its own bureaucracy. So, in 1997, we inherited a creaking planning system in need of reform.^{xxiii}

But democratic participation in planning for municipal socialism was always secondary to the technical expertise of the planners, architects, building contractors and the local leadership role played by fair-minded people of 'good will'.

In the past few decades the apparent class neutrality of planning confronts a fundamental problem. Urban policies are based increasingly on destabilising forms of competition *between* cities for scarce investment from both state and private capital. For the New Right planning inhibited private-led regeneration and needed to be deregulated. But, as the experience under the Tories showed, landowners and developers actually need the legal, financial and

political stability and predictability that planning provides.^{xxiv} Urban regeneration strategies thus depend on 'tax incentives' and 'streamlined planning consent' to attract larger amounts of inward investment from private capitals that have become mythologised by New Labour ideologues as perfectly mobile and fixed to no place in particular. Planning is deregulated as an adjunct to smoothing the activities of private investment funds. As the Urban Task Force put it:

The land use planning system ... is not attuned to the complexity and diversity of the urban condition. It often takes too long to reach decisions and there is too great an emphasis on controlling development. We need urban planning arrangements that are more coherent, more streamlined and more actively committed to making things happen. We want to see a more flexible approach to planning. Too many authorities adhere rigidly to employment and other non-residential zoning for sites with no demand.^{xxv}

Local councils enter into partnership with developers and speculators to re-brand their city as a physically enticing place to do business and one that also, coincidentally, has pools of relatively cheap and skilled labour. Planning is made the subordinate partner, facilitating urban developers and the shiny surfaces of the built environment. Urban entrepreneurs and multinational capital are now exalted by Labour councils, who find themselves complicitly caught-up in an unremitting inter-city competition for investment and concentrating on divisive developments to accommodate the more lucrative needs of the affluent middle class. When planners talk about mixed-tenure housing they never have in mind locating the impoverished working class in middle class parts of town.

Public-Private Partnerships imported from the US the idea that the use of public finance could be used to leverage greater amounts of capital out of private speculators.^{xxvi} New Labour seek a pragmatic middle path between privately-driven forms of US 'New Urbanism' and publicly-driven European forms:

Compared to America, British governments have been much more interventionist. But heavy-handed government control won't work on its own. The old Soviet command economies showed that! And we also know that a totally free market driven solution hasn't been totally successful either. So when it comes to our communities, planning for the future – the Government's role is to provide an enabling framework and influence the market for the public good. That's why we've reformed our planning system to link housing, transport and economic development at the regional level, help narrow the economic gap, create mixed communities, help protect the countryside, reverse the growth of out of town retail, and encourage people and retailers back into our city centres.^{xxvii}

Planning should 'enable' and 'facilitate' the market for socially desirable ends. The Urban Task Force sees the role of the public sector as one of 'pump-priming' for private investment, in other words to transfer investment risk from the private sector to the public sector:

One of the most efficient uses for public money in urban regeneration is to pave the way for investment of much larger sums by the private sector ... Our principal concern in relation to private finance is the market's failure to provide the kind of medium and long-term risk capital that complex area regeneration projects require. Government can help to attract this kind of investment by enabling funders to spread their investment risk more effectively.^{xxviii}

This is a highly precarious way to plan the city, if it can be called planning at all. Not only is it a blatant form of using public money to subsidise private capital but it depends on a naïve view, at best, on the part of politicians of how finance markets work. Take the much-celebrated 1980s London Docklands project which faced a disastrous crisis following the 1987 Wall Street crash. Its legacy is one of monumental folly. In less than a decade private speculation, constantly 'pump-primed' by the state, created luxury housing for

the few but little in the way of new jobs. Instead, deregulated planning produced a mini-crisis of the overproduction of office space in huge glass-clad, white-collar warehouses.^{xxix}

Skin-deep city boosterism

Urban boosterism demands that Town Planners abandon the staid traditions of incremental improvement schemes and support more speculative ventures in 'prestige' developments, as well as easing the passage of private housing schemes, shopping malls and retail parks. Spectacular schemes are adopted to give *the* city, understood metonymically as classless, a competitive edge. In London examples of spectacular developments abound, from Canary Wharf, which was plunged into receivership in 1991, to the hapless Millennium Dome. More recently, what has been called 'the largest piece of urban regeneration and development ever proposed anywhere in the world', the Thames Gateway project, is similarly premised on using state finances to bankroll property regeneration.^{xxx}

A renewed emphasis on architectural design fits well with the marketing of cities as classless places providing a quality lifestyle for the new middle class. In city promotion campaigns, physical appearance is elevated way above other priorities such as decent working class housing. Architect-planners want to attract people into the city on the basis of their cultural and educational training and the opportunities for conspicuous consumption. Waterfront sites are developed with culture, heritage and consumption in mind, as in Bristol's harbour, Leith's dock area, Glasgow Harbour, Dundee Waterfront, London's Tate Modern, and Liverpool's Tate galleries and the proposed £400 million public-private partnership for the redevelopment of the King's Waterfront, or Newcastle's Baltic gallery and Millennium Bridge. Retail is being used to revive city centres like Leeds, Birmingham's notorious Bullring, and Glasgow, with its 'Golden Z' of lengthy, shop-lined city centre streets. One-off, spectacular architectural projects and marketing campaigns will in this way rejuvenate city centres. The appearance of city centre building surfaces is now given heightened attention, perhaps unprecedented since the municipal

civic pride of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Take the Montevetro Tower built in the late 1990s by New Labour's Urban Task Force chairman, Richard Rogers:

The Montevetro Tower, on the banks of the Thames in Battersea, contains some of the most expensive apartments in Britain. The top penthouse suite costs £4.5 million. When the first residents arrive in July 1999, they will enjoy one of the best views that any building in London affords. They can play tennis on the all weather court, relax in the sauna and order theatre tickets, limousines and even maids through the porter's lodge. Best of all, they don't have to share any of these luxuries with their neighbours: a security barrier at the entrance to the grounds ensures that the hoi polloi in the council estates across the road will stay where they belong.^{xxxii}

Here, as Walter Benjamin recognised, the parading of 'cultural treasures' is only made possible by the labour of a working class which is kept concealed at all times.^{xxxiii} More recently, David Widgery made a similar point about the built monuments to capitalist calculation in Canary Wharf:

There is no physical monument to what generations of decent working-class East Enders have created and given and made and suffered. But Cesar Pelli, the architect of fat Canary, tells us that, 'A skyscraper recognises that by virtue of its height it has acquired civic responsibilities. We expect it to have formal characteristics for this unique and socially charged role'. Now that would be interesting to see.^{xxxiv}

At the same time, the physical appearance of many UK city centres and public spaces belie the new metropolitan enthusiasm for architecture, design and heritage. Where they are not been sold off to private speculators, green public spaces like urban parks are being lost or are left in a poor state of up-keep. New Labour promises to pour money into green spaces in English cities while continuing to encourage private developments on playing fields. But the levels

of this have been derisory. The New Opportunities Fund, the main funding source for urban parks, play areas and civic squares only managed to allocate £3.8million out of a budget of £125 million between 1998 and 2002.^{xxxiv} In Scotland, where urban green space is not being made a priority by the Scottish Executive, research shows that between 50 and 60 percent view urban green spaces like parks as unattractive, unsafe, and poor places for children to play.^{xxxv} In city centres, quite distinct places are being flattened out by identikit High Street retail units. Retail giants like Tesco have opened their Express range of stores in response to this burgeoning market, contributing significantly to their record £2 billion profits in 2004, and plan to open another 1000 over the next few years.^{xxxvi} As one architectural journalist put it, 'Tesco branches are breeding like shrink-wrapped rabbits. Where once we had a church in every village, town and city, now we have Tesco with its Extras, Metros and Expresses'.^{xxxvii} This is leading to a shift from abandoned city centre 'Ghost Towns' to what some call 'Clone Town Britain'.^{xxxviii}

Britain is no longer the nation of shopkeepers, so admired by Adam Smith and disdained by Napoleon. If anything, it's become a nation of shopworkers. Cultural conservatives like English Heritage and the London-based *Evening Standard* can rally to defend the cultural loss of 'our' idiosyncratic high streets being replaced by a bland, homogenising invasion of international retailers, with designer clones like Ralph Lauren, DKNY, Starbucks and Gap at the expensive end of the city while at the bottom of the pile are found the low budget clones of McDonalds, Ladbrokes and Blockbuster. The conservative defence of small shopkeepers and family businesses is waged, like New Labour's defence of private finance, in the name of cultural diversity and community identity at both local and national levels. Yet the casting of small businesses in the role of David against the multinational Goliath's is, at best, misplaced. Local stores like butchers, bakers, fishmongers and newsagents have closed at the rate of 50 every week in the UK between 1997 and 2002. And Tesco Express stores *are* undoubtedly having an adverse impact on small stores, with around one third reporting drops in business when an Express opens close by.^{xxxix} But it is a false choice to pose either the defence of small businesses or support for multinational firms, even implicitly. Local

corner shops in deprived communities often charge exorbitant prices for low-grade products, are un-unionised and depend upon low wage labour. That doesn't mean that multinational development ought not to be opposed. They operate near-monopolistic practices, ruthlessly exploit labour globally in sourcing products and exploit labour locally in selling them.^{xi} While New Labour are enforcing new planning policies against out of town retail and re-use of city 'brownfield' sites, this strategy of edge of town retailers re-entering the city centre takes advantage of the deeper concentrations of mainly white collar workers gathered in city centres. Single-person and dual-worker households are doubly exhausted and harassed by workplace intensification and the foreshortened time economy of living and working in the 24 hour urban economy. For such workers the built environment becomes a blurred backdrop, and the creeping standardisation of cities often goes unnoticed.

The pre-eminent example of city-boosterism is Glasgow's widely-acclaimed culture-led regeneration programme.^{xii} As a city beset by long-run industrial decline, unemployment and slum housing, Glasgow's fortunes were supposedly restored by attracting back middle class consumers and service sector jobs. Between 1971 and 2001 Glasgow shed 197,000 manufacturing jobs and acquired 145,000 in services. It now has a much lower proportion of manual workers than the UK as a whole and the perverse combination of a relatively high labour productivity and a low employment rate within the city.^{xiii} Glasgow has become an incessant marketing campaign, emphasising art, culture and architecture, designer shopping and luxury apartments in the restored bourgeois residential quarter, the Merchant City, through to 2004's risible promotion of the city as Scotland's fashion answer to Milan: 'Glasgow: The New Black' or 'Glasgow: Scotland with Style'. This culminated in Glasgow's self-promotion during the previously unremarkable designation of European City of Culture in 1990. Left behind are the working class of Glasgow's large peripheral housing estates, which are in an acute state of decay. As a recent study puts it: 'Working class residents of the core city have lost out from this shift in the composition of Glasgow's economy, while better qualified suburban commuters have prospered'.^{xiii} So while the trend away from manufacturing employment towards services has deepened in Glasgow,

as for all other UK cities, the city has some of the worst poverty and the highest mortality rates in Europe. Seven out of the top ten UK constituencies for premature deaths are in Glasgow, with life expectancy actually declining in some like Shettleston, the UK's poorest constituency where men have a life expectancy of 63 years, ten years less than the Scottish average and 14 less than the UK as a whole. As Mooney argues:

The type of strategy adopted in Glasgow – ‘the Glasgow model’ – has contributed to the *worsening* levels of poverty and deprivation and to the deepening inequalities that characterise the city today. It has done this primarily by constructing Glasgow's future – and the future of tens of thousands of Glaswegians – as a low paid workforce, grateful for the breadcrumbs from the tables of the entrepreneurs and investors upon which so much effort is spent attracting and cosseting – and by marginalizing and ruling out any alternative strategy based upon large-scale public sector investment in sustainable and socially necessary facilities and services.^{xliv}

Similarly, when Liverpool assumes the mantle of European City of Culture in 2008 it will find that, as in Glasgow, place-marketing and flagship cultural boosterism offer no panaceas to the deep-seated class polarisation in that city either.

The physical proximity of different classes in the city often only reinforces their social distance. Spatial segregation on class lines has a long pedigree, well before any attempt to plan the city, as Engels observed of Manchester in the 1840s. Urban planning is now virtually synonymous with design, security and control. As New Labour's ‘sustainable communities’ policy puts it: ‘We will put ‘planning out crime’ at the heart of the planning process.’^{xlv} This is part of a more general effort to ‘design out’ of the city potentially disorderly spaces. One way to do this is through designing public spaces inscribed with a full range of the technologies of urban control, such as the ubiquitous CCTV apparatus and private security firms. Into these controlled spaces the Home Office hope personal identity cards will blend seamlessly. Some see a tension

between the urban control apparatus and the urban renaissance paraphernalia. Urban design becomes another weapon in the arsenal of a middle class resentful that the utopian promise of 'gentrified' inner cities has to confront the dystopian realities on the ground near-by – vandalism, violence, drugs, immigrants, homelessness, begging, and generalised impoverishment. Employment insecurity and ravaged property markets help to stimulate middle class revenge agendas – what the geographer Neil Smith calls 'revanchism' – against the working class and marginalised groups. As they try to forcibly 're-take' the city, especially its inner core areas into which they have sunk investment, they developed exclusive, fortified 'gated communities' to spatially enforce class divisions.^{xlvi} Moreover, the state keeps in reserve a range of punitive measures like Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) as well as the regular forces of law and order. ASBOs can be applied for by a range of urban bodies such as local councils, the police, housing associations and housing action trusts on an extremely loose interpretation of 'anti-social' behaviour and evidence based on hearsay, with custodial sentences handed down to children that breach them.^{xlvii} All of which chimes nicely with New Labour's re-constitution of morally listless poor communities. Middle class revanchism is an exercise in purifying what are seen as disorderly and unruly aspects of the city.^{xlviii} In fact, many categories of crime, especially street crime, are in slow but gradual decline. Yet, a perception of dangerous crime-ridden streets persists, particularly among affluent groups. In April 2003 an ICM/Observer poll showed that three out of four people think that crime is rising while official figures show a decade-long decline. Arguably, this has less to do with the media creating a panic over crime levels, as is often claimed, than with actually-existing class divisions in the city. The poll showed that alongside the elderly those most worried about street crime were not those in deprived areas but those from more affluent areas.

This suggests that here is a qualitative difference in how these groups experience security. For the rich, fear of crime has led to increasingly atomised lifestyles, with wealthier members of society retreating into their homes, cars and offices – ironically a trend that disconnects them

further from the wider community and increases suspicion of others.^{xlix}

A paranoid, re-urbanised middle class visits retribution on what are perceived to be the source of disturbances to lifestyle consumption patterns.

The State of UK Cities

The evidence for an 'urban renaissance' is highly uneven to say the least.ⁱ In terms of changes in population, sectoral employment, labour productivity, inequalities and ethnicity London and its south-east hinterland contrast sharply with the rest of England. Along with New York and Tokyo, London is one of three 'global' cities.ⁱⁱ Globalisation has not dispersed the need for close physical proximity of economic activities. The control and command functions necessary for capitalism gather around core areas, enabling London to play a role unique in the UK, although Edinburgh attempts to play a similar role at a much smaller scale in Scotland. Despite the loss of 250,000 jobs in the early 1990s, London has managed to sustain its base as the locus of economic and political power. This is not only because it is physically the densest metropolitan conurbation, with the largest concentrations of employment, but arguably because it retains so many centres of power, in company headquarters, in the City, in government, in banking and finance. If there is a new logic to spatial concentrations of corporate power in places like London, then it also brings in its wake the production of support functions not usually considered to be part of the so-called Knowledge Economy. These include the routine and specialised tasks that produce, distribute, maintain, clean, equip and house corporate control capabilities. The effect of this clustering of global economic activities has been characterised recently by two critics:

They create a stratum of very high earners, whose spending patterns then affect retail and housing markets; they attract a highly specialised labour force with a disproportionate number of very competitive and/or very creative individuals who spin off new businesses and give these cities their idiosyncratic character; they have strong speculative elements which reinforce cyclical tendencies in the economy; they need highly specialised and expensive kinds of working spaces and

their demands for space skew property markets.^{lii}

All this emphasis on London's strategic location for global economic activities understates the continuing centrality of its position within the national economy and politics of Britain.

London has therefore continued to grow numerically in terms of in-migration and employment. Its population is more ethnically diverse than elsewhere. It is also among the most productive economic areas in the UK. But London is also the most polarised city in terms of extremes of wealth and poverty. In contrast, cities in the north and west of England suffer from protracted decline. In the last twenty years London's population growth outstripped the rest of the UK. While its growth has slowed down, especially after 2001, it still grew faster than other major cities. In the rest of England, larger cities have not been re-populated at the same rate as more rural areas. Cities and metropolitan areas in the north and west of England continue to lose people, albeit at a slower rate. A similar story can be told for employment. Between 1991 and 2001 London saw a 19 percent growth in employment. This was mainly in part-time work, which grew by 47 percent, and, to a much lesser extent, self-employment. Of the urban areas with a population of more than 125,000 employment grew by more than one-fifth in places like Milton Keynes (by 50 per cent), Reading Warrington, Cambridge, Crawley and Worthing. Outside the south of England employment grew much slower, with large cities in the North and West registering a fall in the number of jobs. An exception to this trend is Leeds, second to London in terms of employment growth, and far ahead of Manchester, the next metropolitan area.

Not only numerically but the sectoral nature of urban employment has changed. In the ten years to 2001, manufacturing lost around 1 in 8 jobs, part of a long secular decline of employment in that sector. This shift affected London as hard as northern cities. For an instance, a skills audit of the London Gateway zone found that two-thirds of workers did not have the qualifications to take up the service-sector jobs in Canary Wharf. Jobs in 'financial services' grew in most towns and cities but grew faster, by some 50

percent, in London. Public sector employment also grew by around ten percent in the period, with the exception of London, where it fell slightly. Devolution has ensured a faster growth of public sector employment in Cardiff and Edinburgh, despite efforts to disperse work to other regions. Edinburgh has the highest concentration of civil servants and public sector workers of any city in Scotland.^{liii} In terms of labour productivity in cities, at least as measured by Gross Value Added per employee, there is a sharp north-south divide. In a handful of cities and towns in the south and east of England, each worker was calculated to produce an average value of £40,000 or more in 2001:

Apart from London, the highest labour productivity is found in the south and east small cities and larger towns like Aldershot, High Wycombe, Oxford and Reading. There are no cities further north than Derby or further west than Swindon, which have labour productivity higher than the average as a whole.^{liv}

In contrast, cities in Scotland lagged well behind even those English cities with lower average productivity, with Edinburgh having the highest GVA (£22,168), Aberdeen (£19,300) and Glasgow (£19,110), which had the highest increase (44 percent) between 1995 and 2001.^{lv}

Population change in UK core conurbations, 1995-2000

	Population in 1991 (000s)	Change 1995-2000 (percent)
London	6889.9	5.3
Manchester	438.5	1.6
Sheffield	529.3	0.3
Leeds	717.4	0.2
Birmingham	1006.5	-0.7
Glasgow	631.7	-1.5
Liverpool	480.7	-0.8

Source: Turok

In terms of social structure large disparities exist between and within cities. This reflects a broad pattern of regional differences, with a clear north-west/south-east divide. Such measures disguise huge variations within cities, with London having the most extreme inequalities. Life expectancy in England is highest in Norwich at 79.8 years and lowest in Liverpool at 75.7 years. Thirty percent or more of the population of Cambridge, Oxford and London had university-level qualifications, while Barnsley, Grimsby and Mansfield had the least. In terms of poverty indices, the highest proportions of adults claiming Income Support and Job Seekers allowance benefits in 2003 were in Liverpool (18 percent), Hull (17 percent), and Birmingham, Hastings, Newcastle and Middlesbrough (13 percent). But here London was not far behind at 10.3 per cent. Such measures drastically underestimate the scale of poverty in UK cities, neglecting as they do other poverty-related benefits such as disability, housing and state pensions, and the poverty wages paid to many of those in paid employment. Conurbations and large cities in the north and west of England typically have twice the average share of the poorest areas. Here London again shows the sharpest polarisation of any city in the UK, containing within it some of the most affluent areas and some of the poorest ones. Like London, Edinburgh also has the starkest extremes of wealth and poverty, with unemployment rates of between 20-25 percent to be found in the city's peripheral housing schemes such as Pilton, Muirhouse, Wester Hailes and Craigmillar.^{lvi}

It is commonly assumed that cities tend to be more diverse and liberal in terms of immigration and ethnicity. While the number of 'white' people in London and the other urban areas fell by 1.17 million cities were repopulated by the 1.13 million ethnic minorities moving into the city. Again, the largest volume of increase in inward migration was in London, taking nearly 50 percent of the national total. Ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated in the high density zones of a small number of UK cities. Far from being a drain on local services or employment, the economic and social activity of ethnic minority groups often helps to rejuvenate urban spaces that would otherwise deteriorate even further.^{lvii} The perception that racism has become

widespread over the past five years is held by more people in cities and towns in the north and west, where more people also report themselves to have racial prejudices. In contrast, Londoners are less likely to see themselves as racist and fewer think that racism is on the increase. On the other hand, more than 90,000 voters in London backed the British National Party in 2004.

Table: Perceptions of racial prejudice compared to five years ago

	London	North and west urban	South and east urban	All England
More	35	53	41	44
Less	23	18	20	21
Same	39	26	36	32

Source: State of the Cities

Table: Self-declared racial prejudice

	London	North and West urban	South and east urban	All England
Some prejudice	29	34	31	31
No prejudice	70	65	68	67

Source: State of the Cities

The Political Economy of Housing

Housing is always a critical factor in the political economy of the city. Even allowing for housing costs a similar geographical north-south pattern emerges, despite the scale of property inflation in the south of England. The *average* price of housing shows huge disparities, with London five times more expensive than Burnley. Capitalism creates extremely uneven geographies of growth and decline. In many northern cities, a vicious cycle has been underway for decades. On the back of economic restructuring, the demand for

housing skilled workers fell away in many neighbourhoods, resulting in nearly a million unoccupied homes and rock bottom property values in parts of the North and the Midlands. As the population density of localities falls so it becomes unprofitable for retail and services to operate there. But elsewhere, with changes to household structure arising from more people living alone for longer, the government estimate that an extra 3.8 million households will form between 1996 and 2021, an increase of a fifth. There are also more than 85,000 homeless households in temporary accommodation, most with children and disproportionately from ethnic minorities. At the same time, around 730,000 dwellings, mostly privately-owned, are lying unoccupied.^{lviii}

Housing the working class in cities in the south, especially but not exclusively low-paid public sector workers, is creating huge tensions for servicing the future prospects for capital accumulation. More than £200 billion of public sector funding, or 60 percent of total spending, goes into English cities and towns. New Labour admit that another 200,000 homes are needed in London and the South East, over and above their previous estimates in the four targeted growth areas: Thames Gateway, London-Stansed-Cambridge corridor, Ashford, and Milton Keynes-South Midlands. State intervention in the housing market, albeit in the perverse form of 'private partnerships', has again become essential to trying to sustain the UK's world city of accumulation, London. As Prescott stated:

It involves getting key workers like teachers and nurses into homes in London. And its about providing more affordable homes for first time purchasers who haven't been able to get up the housing ladder ... Many of you will have heard me at the Labour Party conference talking about the £60,000 dwelling. Constructing a home for a guaranteed price. There was a lot of talk afterwards about how it wasn't possible. Well, I'm going to prove people wrong. We're going to do it.^{lix}

New Labour's approach differs from the Tories before them. It is not only the emphasis on sustainable communities, partnership and inclusion but also the extent to which the local state should step back even further from taking direct

responsibility for housing and a more central role is given to private uses of public money. To quote Prescott's speech on the London Gateway:

Michael Heseltine focussed on the East Thames Corridor in 1991. He put the Gateway on the map, but I have to say that there is a fundamental difference in our approach. We think it is essential to develop sustainable communities with the participation of the people who live there. Our approach is all about partnership. Private money, public money, working together to create sustainable communities. Above all, this offers more investment, more quickly, than the state or the private sector can deliver on their own.^{lx}

This is simply another way of turning social housing over to the market, using public subsidies for privatising housing supply. Local authorities are being forced to abandon their 'landlord function', that is to directly own and manage housing tenancies. Instead city leaders and planners are to remove themselves from detailed intervention and manage the competitive city at arm's length as a business. As part of New Labour's five year plan for housing, by 2010 more 'choice' will exist for social housing. This will be achieved by spending £11.3 billion of public money on 'Arms Length Management Organisations', Private Finance Initiatives and Stock Transfers. Full public ownership and control of social housing is ruled out. As Prescott put it to English local authorities: 'There is no need for a 4th option – and there will not be a 4th option – for providing additional funds direct to local authorities to meet the target'.^{lxi} Authorities that fail to adopt these measures will be denied funding from the Housing Investment Programme to improve their housing stock. On the other hand, New Labour will go to any length to ensure that housing ownership and control passes out of the hands of the local state: 'We will remove any unnecessary barriers to stock transfer, including the cost of early redemption of Public Works Loan Board debt, extending arrangements for repaying overhanging debt to partial stock transfers, and exploring options for gap funding of negative value housing stock'.^{lxii}

Far from disappearing, then, as a political issue housing has been re-ignited as a matter of deep contention.^{lxiii} Nowhere was this more evident than the Stock Transfer of Glasgow's council housing in 2002.^{lxiv} Glasgow has some of the poorest quality housing in the UK, with 88 percent of council tenants living in the most run down postcode areas and 80 percent in receipt of housing benefit or paying no rent. Glasgow City Council also had a huge housing debt of some £900 million. The Treasury agreed to abolish this debt at a stroke on the transfer of its 80,000 houses to a not-for-profit body, the Glasgow Housing Agency. Tenants were faced with the impossible choice of remaining with a failed local state option or gambling on what is, through the involvement of private finance, effectively privatisation by another name to deliver improved living conditions: 'There is at the heart of all this an irreconcilable conflict between the needs of private financiers and the pursuit of meaningful tenant empowerment and quality social housing that is democratically controlled'.^{lxv} After an intense, multi-million pound marketing campaign Glasgow tenants voted for transfer by a small margin. Despite the fact that continued council ownership was a far from attractive option the transfer was contested by a range of groups. Stock transfer was successfully resisted in other parts of the UK, most notably in Birmingham, but also in Camden, Kingston and Wrexham. Activists in some of these campaigns could propose a revitalised council housing option. In Glasgow, the alternative offered by activists too often came down to an unpalatable promise of more of the same from Glasgow council. As Mooney and Poole argue:

In the context of the government's commitment to fiscal 'prudence', an overriding concern with 'management' and managerialism, and with 'modernisation', it is perhaps difficult to envisage that an alternative form of social housing could be enacted that would give tenants real choice and real control. Defending public sector housing provision in Glasgow would arguably have been more successful if the campaign had developed clear proposals for tenant involvement and tenant participation.^{lxvi}

Coming up with alternative visions of the city should not mean replacing one

undemocratic measure with another.

Whose city?

Cities are permanent sites of struggle and potential places of emancipation. By concentrating workers in relatively small spaces they can be both efficient and ecological. On the other hand, by spreading fewer people into the thin densities of sub-urban and semi-rural life finite resources are used up more intensively. This goes against the grain of much anti-urban rhetoric about cities as wasteful and ecological damaging. Anti-urban mythology, particularly among countryside activists and some environmentalists, claims that cities are the antithesis of sustainability. 'True' nature is destroyed by the city and can only survive outside its rapacious environs. In fact, cities are not somehow 'unnatural' but places where urban plants and animals can flourish in even the most densely populated quarters.^{lxvii} While out-of-town commuters congest roads and crowd onto trains, city dwellers are able to walk, cycle or use public transport to get around. In London, people are much more likely than in any other place to walk for at least 15 minutes a day, partly because most Londoners have bus stops and tube stations within half a mile of their home. Non-urban populations are significantly more likely to be the sole occupant of a car. While congestion charges displace vehicle traffic from the core of the city and increase walking cycling and bus use, the wealthiest car users can readily afford to pay a levy that gives them less congested city streets to drive through. The health impact of urban car use typically falls where ring roads skirt past the poorest parts of town rather than on suburban commuters who congest them. In the case of industrial location, polluting factories are twice as likely to be situated in post-code areas with average incomes of less than £15,000.

As they stand, UK cities are far from the utopian images of them. Capitalism faces the insurmountable contradiction that it is driven to destroy its own lifeblood in the city. Much of the urban fabric is dilapidated, with some 1.3 million buildings lying empty, and public spaces are turned into hostile surveillance zones. The uneven development of UK cities means that they are caught up in a contradictory bind. All the possibilities of communal life present

themselves but only in highly distorted ways. Town Planning does not plan the productive activities or consumption needs of the city but re-arranges the scraps left behind in capitalism's disruptive wake in narrowly specialised technical and legal ways. It lacks popular democratic legitimacy, although it may grant some form of consultation to local communities affected by developers and property speculators. And the results will tend conform to the bland myopia of private developers.

Planning need not mean uniform rows of boxes, varied only by some cheap ornamental quirk.

Order and some degree of regulation do not mean turning London or Manchester into a vision dredged from the notebook of Albert Speer, the Nazi architect. London County Council housing estates from the turn of the century, designed by young socialist architects, still surprise with their gentle and civilised order. Here were not just so many soulless 'housing units' as we have learnt to call the homes for the poor, but a celebration of the ideals of John Ruskin, William Morris and the Arts & Crafts movement: formal, ordered, yet not without beauty, designed to be a decent home to the poorest Londoners, the cockneys of yesterday, the Bengalis of today, and a far cry from either Broadwater Farm or their free-market successors.^{lxviii}

Now, we don't have to accept the wistful nostalgia of Victorian socialist-architects as a model, just as we have no need to accept Modernist plans uncritically either. But at least they pose an alternative vision to the impoverished one offered by New Labour. And it is here that the communities of resistance need to be couterposed to the New Labour image of communities of competition and cohesion. Communities of resistance are formed in combining to take action against closures of local services. While the state bolsters its coercive arm over working class areas it retreats from the provision of basic services – public transport, council housing, health services, and leisure facilities. The closure of local swimming pools, for example, can rouse local people into action, as evidenced in the intense protest movements

in 2001 at Manchester's Neptune Kingdom, known locally as the Gorton Tub, and Glasgow's Govanhill pool, and help create an active community of resistance:

While New Labour is keen to celebrate certain types of active communities who engage in 'approved' forms of local action, it is also prepared to use the full coercive force of the state to deal with active communities who challenge the authority of local government. Indeed, the experience in Govanhill demonstrates the revanchism of New Labour's project for an urban renaissance based around active communities: an iron fist lurks with the velvet glove of New Labour's urban regeneration agenda.^{lxix}

Unspectacular, local resistance is an in-built feature of the urban environment. Much of this takes place at subterranean depths, around concrete issues (sometimes literally). At times, urban struggles burst beyond the banks of local issues and put into sharper relief the wider forces shaping British cities. This now hidden, now visible struggle therefore continually poses the question – 'whose city?'

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- ⁱ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Our Towns and Cities: Delivering an Urban Renaissance*, London, 2000.
- ⁱⁱ J. Prescott, Foreword, *State of the Cities: A Progress Report to the Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit*, London, 2005. Prescott, as New Labour's Deputy Prime Minister, has responsibility for delivering the urban regeneration programme. We will therefore make regular recourse to his claims in this article.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance: report of the Urban Task Force – Executive Summary*, London, 1999.
- ^{iv} Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance: Report of the Urban Task Force – Executive Summary*, London, 1999, p. 2, our emphasis.
- ^v A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism*, London, 1990.
- ^{vi} Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance: report of the Urban Task Force*, London, 1999, p. 11.
- ^{vii} M. Lavelette and G. Mooney, 'New Labour, new moralism: the welfare politics and ideology of New Labour under Blair', *International Socialism*, 85, 1999.
- ^{viii} See the statement by John Prescott, *Sustainable Communities – Building for the Future*, London, 2003.
- ^{ix} J. Prescott, 'Speech to Local Government Association General Assembly', 15 December 2004.
- ^x Social Exclusion Unit, *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, London, 1998.
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- ^{xii} See W.B. Gallie, 'Essentially contested concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 1955.
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- ^{xiv} See the qualified defence of communitarianism in A. Callinicos, *Against the Third Way*, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 63-5.
- ^{xv} See Sean Damer's critique of planning in Glasgow in *From Moorepark to 'Wine-Alley': The Rise and Fall of a Glasgow Housing Scheme*, Edinburgh, 1989, and Cynthia Cockburn on Lambeth in *The Local State: Management of Cities and People*, London, 1977.
- ^{xvi} C. Cockburn, *The Local State: Management of Cities and People*, London, 1977, p. 159.
- ^{xvii} New Economics Foundation, *Clone Town Britain*, 2004, p. 2.
- ^{xviii} Department of the Environment, *Urban Renaissance: A Better Life for Towns*, London, 1980.
- ^{xix} A. Holden and K. Iveson, 'Designs on the urban: New Labour's urban renaissance and the spaces of citizenship', *City*, 7.1, 2003. p.69.
- ^{xx} S. Howieson, 'Out of the dead zone', *Socialist Worker*, 1935, 22 January 2005.
- ^{xxi} See S. Power, 'The development of the Ballymun housing scheme, Dublin, 1965-1969', *Irish Geography*, 33, 2000.
- ^{xxii} S. Howieson, 'Out of the dead zone', *Socialist Worker*, 1935, 22 January 2005.

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- ^{xxiii} J. Prescott, ‘Speech to Local Government Association General Assembly’, 15 December 2004, p. 4.
- ^{xxiv} P. Allmendinger and H. Thomas, eds., *Urban Planning and the New Right*, London and New York, 1998.
- ^{xxv} Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance: Report of the Urban Task Force- Executive Summary*, London, 1999, p. 17.
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- ^{xxxiii} D. Widgery, *Some Lives! A GPs East End*, London, 1991, p. 164.
- ^{xxxiv} New Economics Foundation, *Ghost Town Britain*, London, 2003, p. 21.
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- ^{xxxvi} ‘Tesco: Profit with honour’, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2005.
- ^{xxxvii} J. Glancey, quoted by A. Simms, ‘The gaudy sameness of Clone Town’, *New Statesman*, 24 January 2004.
- ^{xxxviii} See New Economics Foundation, *Ghost Town Britain*, London, 2003; New Economics Foundation, *Clone Town Britain*, London, 2004; and New Economics Foundation, *Ghost Town Britain II*, London, 2005.
- ^{xxxix} *Ghost Town II*, p. 2.
- ^{xl} J. Blythman, *Shopped: The Shocking Power of British Supermarkets*, London, 2004; J. Blythman, ‘The great supermarket rip-off’, *Socialist Worker*, 1922, 9 October 2004.
- ^{xli} The literature on Glasgow’s ‘renewal’ supports a minor cottage industry. This section is based mainly on G. Mooney, ‘Cultural policy as urban transformation? Critical reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990’, *Local Economy*, 19.4, 2004.
- ^{xlii} I. Turok and N. Bailey, ‘Glasgow’s recent trajectory: Partial recovery and its consequences’, in D. Newlands, M. Danson and J. McCarthy, eds., *Divided Scotland: The Nature, Causes and Consequences of Economic Disparities within Scotland*, Aldershot, 2004.
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- ^{xliv} G. Mooney, ‘Cultural policy as urban transformation? Critical reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990’, *Local Economy*, 19.4, 2004. p. 337.
- ^{xlv} *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*, London, 2003, p. 21.
- ^{xlvi} N. Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, London and New York.

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- ^{xlvi} See 'In focus: ASBOs', *Socialist Worker*, 1930a, 1 December 2004.
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- ^{li} S. Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton, 2000.
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- ^{liii} R.W. McQuaid, 'Edinburgh and its hinterland', in D. Newlands, M. Danson and J. McCarthy, eds., *Divided Scotland: The Nature, Causes and Consequences of Economic Disparities within Scotland*, Aldershot, 2004. The attempt to disperse jobs from the headquarters of Scottish Natural Heritage in Edinburgh to Inverness met fierce opposition from civil service workers and trades unions.
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- ^{lviii} *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*, London, 2003, p. 11.
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- ^{lx} J. Prescott, speech to Thames Gateway Forum, 24 November 2004.
- ^{lxi} J. Prescott, 'Speech to Local Government Association General Assembly', 15 December 2004.
- ^{lxii} *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*, London, 2003, p. 15.
- ^{lxiii} See the Defend Council Housing campaign website for campaign updates: <http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/>
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