

Locality, politics and culture : Poplar in the 1920s.

Rose, Gillian Cathryn

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/jspui/handle/123456789/1706>

Information about this research object was correct at the time of download; we occasionally make corrections to records, please therefore check the published record when citing. For more information contact scholarlycommunications@qmul.ac.uk

LOCALITY, POLITICS AND CULTURE:
POPLAR IN THE 1920s

Gillian Cathryn Rose

Thesis submitted for the Ph.D. examination

Queen Mary College



ABSTRACT

The thesis begins with a discussion of the literature on local working-class politics, which includes the work of labour historians, political geographers and locality-study writers. The latter have been especially keen to acknowledge the unique causal powers of the social formations of specific localities and to explore the implications of these for local political behaviour. Nonetheless, locality studies share with other approaches to local politics an interest in class to exclusion of other bases of social action, and a structuralism which denies human agency.

The history of Poplar in the 1920s denies such explanatory logic. The Labour Party came to power in the borough in 1919. Yet although the class and economic structure of Poplar was very similar to that of the rest of east London, Poplar Labour Party was unique in the degree of its militancy.

In order to explain this radicalism, the thesis turns away from structural analysis and towards cultural interpretation, exploring Poplar's politics in terms of local culture and civil society, focussing on five themes: the politics of class and of gender, the discourses of citizenship, the morality of the neighbourhoods and the religious faiths. The influence of these cultural 'communal sensibilities' on Poplar Labour Party are traced in order to stress the complexity and contingency of the relationship between a locality and its politics.

That contingency is further emphasised in the conclusion, which describes the shift in Poplar Labour Party away from a left-wing and participatory form of politics and towards a right-wing and elitist mode as the 1920s progressed. It is concluded that both types of politics were closely linked to Poplar's culture and that, although local culture in all its complexity is vital for the understanding of local politics, there is no necessary relationship between a culture and the form of political expression it may take.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Abstract.....	2
Table of contents.....	3
List of tables.....	4
List of illustrations.....	5
List of abbreviations used in the text.....	6
List of abbreviations used in the footnotes.....	7
Chapter I: 'Without some knowledge of the locality it is impossible to understand Poplarism': theories of local working-class politics.....	8
Chapter II: 'Ours is a class movement simply because only our class remains in Poplar': the politics of class in 1920s Poplar.....	53
Chapter III: 'The conquest of ego by altruism': discourses of citizenship in 1920s Poplar.....	120
Chapter IV: 'You knew if you were in need there was somebody': the neighbourhood and Poplar's politics.....	182
Chapter V: 'The essentially religious nature of the revolt': religion and politics in 1920s Poplar....	237
Chapter VI: 'Voting Labour was natural': conclusions theoretical and empirical.....	296
Appendix.....	346
Bibliography.....	350

LIST OF TABLES

	page
Table 1: major occupations of Poplar workers 1921-31..	25
Table 2: percentage turnout of Poplar and London voters in local elections 1919-28.....	29
Table 3: percentage of Labour seats on borough councils and Boards of Guardians in London and Poplar 1919-28.....	29
Table 4: strikes in Poplar 1919-29.....	60
Table 5: Poplar Metropolitan Borough Council's outstanding loans and rates levied 1919-29.....	90
Table 6: unemployment in Poplar 1919-29.....	113
Table 7: residence of marriage partners in two Poplar parishes 1919-29.....	193
Table 8: occupations of Poplar's Guardians and councillors 1919-29.....	205
Table 9: numbers in receipt of relief from Poplar Board of Guardians 1919-29.....	217
Table 10: activities at Anglican churches in 1920s Poplar.....	265

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	page
<u>1. Maps</u>	
Map 1: Poplar.....	22
Map 2: local government boundaries in Poplar.....	23
Map 3: number of seats won by the Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance in local elections 1919-29.....	133
Map 4: settlements in Poplar.....	162
Map 5: residence of women turning to the Workers' Suffrage Federation for help during the Great War.	202
Map 6: residence of councillors in 1919.....	207
Map 7: residence of the Irish population in one Catholic parish.....	227
Map 8: population change in Poplar 1921-31.....	232
Map 9: places of worship in Poplar.....	248
Map 10: residence of Harley Street Congregational Church members.....	258
Map 11: residence of councillors in 1929.....	316
<u>2. Photographs</u>	
Casual dockers waiting for work some time in the 1920s	26
Poplar's councillors before going to gaol in 1921.....	30
Sylvia Pankhurst before the Great War.....	101
The gender of war.....	105
Women carrying bread from Poplar Board of Guardians...	107
A procession of jobless Poplar men.....	114
A poor Poplar street: Maroon Street, 1936.....	189
Two 'beans' from Isle of Dogs pubs in the 1920s.....	195
The crowds watching the councillors being taken to gaol, 1921.....	216
Members of the women's meeting at Lax's chapel in 1929	254
Rook Street decorated for the 1920 Catholic procession	263
The Workers' Socialist Federation view of Poplar Labour Party.....	312

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
COS	Charity Organisation Society
CURS	Changing Urban and Regional System
ELNS	East London Nursing Society
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NFDDSS	National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
PABG	Poplar Association for Befriending Girls
PBARS	Poplar Benevolent and Accident Relief Society
PBMA	Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance
PCC	Parochial Church Council
PWLG	Poplar Women's Labour Guild
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UWO	Unemployed Workers' Organisation
WSF	Workers' Socialist Federation

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

BMA	Hackney Local History Library, Bryant and May archive
GLP	British Library of Political and Economic Science, George Lansbury papers
GLRO	Greater London Record Office
GSA	Trades Union Congress Library, General Strike archive
IHT	Island History Trust
LLPA	Greater London Record Office, London Labour Party archive
<u>New Survey</u>	London School of Economics and Political Science, <u>New Survey of London Life and Labour</u> , 9 vols (London, 1930-35)
<u>New Survey</u> HCS	British Library of Political and Economic Science, <u>New Survey of London Life and Labour</u> household card survey, boxes 32 and 33 on Poplar
<u>New Survey</u> MC	British Library of Political and Economic Science, <u>New Survey of London Life and Labour</u> manuscript collection
PBMA	Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance
PBMAA	Tower Hamlets Local History Library, Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance archive
PMBC	Poplar Metropolitan Borough Council
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Records Office, Kew
THLHL	Tower Hamlets Local History Library
SPP	International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Sylvia Pankhurst papers

CHAPTER I

'WITHOUT SOME KNOWLEDGE OF THE LOCALITY
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND POPULARISM':
THEORIES OF LOCAL WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

There can be no doubt that 'locality' is a key word in the disciplinary discourse of 1980s geography; it has even been suggested that the locality has reached paradigmatic status, spawning a 'new geography' consisting of locality studies.¹ This transmogrification of one of geography's most basic descriptive terms has occurred in the context of a major shift in the social sciences, away from law-like general theories and towards a focus on the specific and the contingent. One of the more important causes of geography's involvement in this shift is its concern with contemporary voting patterns, which are spectacularly failing to conform to the laws of political behaviour drawn up by orthodox political science and which seem to be increasingly shaped by some kinds of 'locational influences'.² Concern to discover exactly what these spatial influences on political behaviour may be has led Agnew to argue that, since the social processes which create political allegiances are geographically specific, they can only be recovered through 'the micro-sociological emphasis of a fully fledged place perspective'.³ Locality and politics are thus an intertwined conceptual couplet at the heart of contemporary geography.

Their intertwining has taken a specific theoretical form however, heavily influenced by a realist epistemology

1. A. Cochrane, 'What a Difference a Space Makes: The New Structuralism of Locality', Antipode, 19 (1987), 354-363 (p.354).

2. R.J. Johnston, The Geography of English Politics: The 1983 General Election (London, 1985), p.16.

3. J.A. Agnew, 'Place Anyone?', Political Geography Quarterly, 6 (1987), 39-40 (p.40). This claim is developed more fully in J.A. Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society (London, 1987).

and by Marxist theory. The theoretical aim of this thesis is to replace this currently fashionable understanding of local political processes with an interpretive account which stresses the centrality of culture to politics. Focussing on one local state, it argues that local cultural sensibilities were crucial both to the policy of local political parties and to the local support they attracted.

This first chapter explores the theoretical terrain. It opens with a discussion of the current formulations of locality and local political processes. The socialist council of the east London borough of Poplar in the 1920s is often introduced in this literature as an exemplar of its theories of political action, and the chapter then introduces Poplar in the same terms as the place is represented in these accounts: a representation which focusses on Poplar's class and labour market structure. This characterisation of Poplar and the theory of politics which underlies it are then argued to be irredeemably flawed and quite unable to explain why Poplar was so radical a locality. The rest of the chapter offers an alternative theorisation of local politics by examining a certain concept of culture. It argues that local cultures are fundamental in answering the main questions of the thesis: what shapes a local political party's policies and why can such parties win mass support?

This chapter thus clears the theoretical ground; the following chapters explore in empirical detail the complexity of the relationships between locality, politics and culture in 1920s Poplar.

Locality and politics.

This section describes the central features of the current conventional understanding of locality and politics, an essential task if a valid critique is to be offered. It begins by tracing the development of the locality concept, since many of the most basic assumptions now made by geographers concerning political action depend on theorisations of locality.

Locality

After its rejection of the positivism which had dominated large areas of the discipline in the 1960s, geography entered a period of theoretical confusion. Wildly divergent alternatives were offered as potential paradigms, ranging from the humanism of Buttimer to the Marxism of Harvey,⁴ but none achieved hegemony. By the end of the 1970s a consensus was emerging on the importance of 'place' to geography,⁵ yet although the isotropic plane had been decisively rejected in favour of the rich diversity of real locations, major differences in the conceptualisation of place remained. Gregory's realist epistemology rejected Guelke's quasi-phenomenology; Pocock's cultural idealism was challenged by Silk's materialism; Relph's voluntarism was found inadequate by Jackson's structuralism.⁶ By the mid-1980s the theoretical picture was becoming a little clearer as a particular understanding of place (or, as it was now known, 'locality') became dominant. It is this formulation to which the phrase 'new geography' referred and with which this section is concerned.

The concept of locality is based in large part on the attempts made by certain sociologists to integrate space into social theory, something which, as geographers are constantly pointing out, the founding fathers of social theory singularly failed to do. The work of Giddens is

4. A. Buttimer and D. Seamon, The Human Experience of Space and Place (London, 1980); D. Harvey, Social Justice and the City (London, 1973).

5. for overviews of this development, see D.I. Scargill, 'Space, Place and Region: Towards a Transformed Regional Geography', Geography, 70 (1985), 138-41, and P. Jackson, 'The Rediscovery of Space', Progress in Human Geography, 10 (1986), 118-24.

6. D. Gregory, 'The Discourse of the Past: Phenomenology, Structuralism and Historical Geography', Journal of Historical Geography, 4 (1978), 161-73; L. Guelke, Historical Understanding in Geography, (Cambridge, 1982); D.C.D. Pocock (ed.), Humanistic Geography and Literature (London, 1981); J. Silk, 'Beyond Geography and Literature', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 2 (1984), 151-78; E. Relph, Place and Placelessness (London, 1976); P. Jackson, 'A Plea for Cultural Geography', Area, 12 (1980), 110-13.

foremost in this project of course,⁷ but his influence on geography has been most profound within the structure/agency debate of the early 1980s. In terms of locality-studies, it is the theoretical analyses of John Urry which have had most impact.⁸

Urry conceptualises the importance of space to social processes within a realist epistemology, which means he attributes causal power to non-observable structural entities. In his own inimitable words:

it is necessary to investigate the changing spatial/ temporal relations between diverse determinate social entities, which are themselves temporally and spatially structured and which possess causal powers which may or may not be realised. Thus, empirical events in general, and the spatial patterning of such events in particular, are to be explained in terms of the complex, overlapping and temporally/spatially structured relations between such entities. Thus, time and space occupy variable relations in the analysis: they characterise 'empirical events', the structure of causally-productive entities, and the interrelations between such entities.⁹

Another advocate of realism, Andrew Sayer, explained how empirical research was at the core of this epistemology. The concrete, he noted, is a combination of several causal entities, 'but the form of the combination is contingent, and therefore only determinable through empirical research'.¹⁰

An extremely influential paper published in 1981 by Urry suggested that such research on current social change

7. for a summary of his project, see A. Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration (Cambridge, 1984).

8. Duncan has assessed the importance of Giddens's idea of locale and has concluded that it is of little relevance to locality studies. S.S. Duncan, What is Locality?, Urban and Regional Studies Working Paper 51, (University of Sussex, 1986), pp.23-8.

9. J. Urry, 'Social Relations, Space and Time', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.20-48 (p.27).

10. A. Sayer, 'Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation', Radical Philosophy, 28 (1981), 6-15 (p.9).

should concentrate on the local.¹¹ He justified this by arguing that the spatial structure of capital was international but that its geography was increasingly influenced by local labour markets. Thus Urry claimed that it was the locality which was crucial to understanding contemporary social and economic restructuring, and that the locality was equivalent to the local labour market.

The realist epistemology explicated by Sayer and Urry as a means of uniting abstract theory with empirical research has inspired many analyses of local economies and local social and political change.¹² But an epistemology is not a theory and theories of locality have multiplied confusingly, mainly because the exact nature of 'causal entities' was unclear in Urry's work. In the early 1980s one theorisation was especially prominent: the concept of locality used by the Changing Urban and Regional System (CURS) research project. Seven towns were chosen for study in order to understand the current economic and social restructuring of England, and the primary theoretical basis of the CURS analysis was Doreen Massey's revision of industrial location theory.

The aim of Massey's seminal study of 'spatial divisions of labour' was to explain Britain's industrial geography by stressing geographical variability and the contingent nature of industrial location.¹³ She argued that 'the structure of local economies can be seen as a product of the combination of "layers", of the successive imposition over the years of new rounds of investment, new forms of activity'.¹⁴ Further,

11. J. Urry, 'Localities, Regions and Social Class', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 5 (1981), 455-74.

12. see for example the Lancaster Regionalism Group, Localities, Class and Gender (London, 1985); H. Newby and others, Restructuring Capital: Recession and Reorganisation in Industrial Society (London, 1985); G. Rees and others, Political Action and Social Identity: Class, Locality and Ideology (London, 1985).

13. D. Massey, Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production (London, 1984) and 'In What Sense a Regional Problem?', Regional Studies, 13 (1979), 233-43.

14. Massey, Spatial Divisions, pp.117-8.

the disruption ... that results from the insertion of a local area into a new division of labour, will depend on the existing character of the area, itself a result of an already long and complex history ... local areas are not just passive in receipt of changes handed down from some higher national or international level. The vast variety of conditions already existing at local level also affects how those processes themselves operate.¹⁵

Thus localities were seen as the result of an historical process of capital restructuring, each new round of investment being affected by the consequences of previous rounds. This theorisation of locality as the intersection of wider entities and processes has been described as 'contingent local variation'¹⁶.

That Massey's is a theory built upon realist notions of causal entities is clear and Cooke, the co-ordinator of the CURS project, has continued to work within the realist framework. Like Urry, he sees labour markets as the key to social change in localities.

Creating this recomposition effect in the local class structure is the process whereby the spatial division of labour is restructured on an increasingly international scale. New and more highly differentiated local labour markets come into existence because of the ways in which the production process in large corporated organisations is decomposed or fragmented in ways which take advantage of the size, skills and level of unionisation of local labour markets.¹⁷

In this argument, labour markets are defined on two criteria: geography and skill. The stress placed on them by Cooke and Urry implies a stronger theorisation of locality than Massey's, one in which causal power is given to an entity created locally by the intersection of other entities, and this can be termed a 'causal local process'.¹⁸ The CURS project seems to have wavered between

15. Massey, Spatial Divisions, p.119.

16. M. Savage and others, 'Locality Research': The Sussex Programme on Economic Restructuring, Social Change and the Locality', Quarterly Journal of Social Affairs, 3 (1987), 27-51 (p.30).

17. P. Cooke, Theories of Planning and Spatial Development (London, 1983), p.222.

18. Savage and others, 'Locality Research', p.31.

these two understandings of locality, one causally passive and one more active,¹⁹ the latter becoming more popular as more local research was undertaken. After studying Lancaster, Urry, for example, noted that:

there are systematic processes occurring at a locality or regional level which mean that outcomes at the sub-national level are principally the result of those locality or sub-regional processes rather than of how certain national phenomena are sub-nationally distributed. One example is where local policy outcomes are the result of the specific balance of local social and political forces (a given 'spatial coalition' for example) which cannot be read off from the distribution of national occupational classes in that area.²⁰

The example Urry gives of a 'causal local process'-- 'local social and political forces' -- brings this discussion to the understanding of politics developed within the CURS project.

The theorisations of politics in locality-studies

Once again it is appropriate to start with the work of Massey. She argued that 'each new round of investment brings with it potentially new economic bases of social organisation, new "structural capacities" [for class action] and a new overall position within the broader geographical division of labour'.²¹ All of these she saw as crucial to local political movements; as the economic structure changed, so too did the resources and balance of classes, thus altering a locality's politics. This association of the economic, the industrial workplace and politics has remained at the centre of CURS locality-studies, as will now be shown.

Massey's understanding of politics clearly sails dangerously close to the shoals of economic determinism. Massey is aware of this and tries to avoid wrecking herself by stressing that the economic is just one among many

19. N. Gregson, 'The CURS Initiative: Some Further Comments', Antipode, 19 (1987), 364-370.

20. J. Urry, 'Locality Research: The Case of Lancaster', Regional Studies, 20 (1986), 233-42, (p.239).

21. Massey, Spatial Divisions, p.118.

processes sedimenting themselves on localities over time and that 'there are also cultural, political and ideological strata, layers which also have their local specificities' and which also affect political behaviour.²² Nonetheless, the impact of these other strata on political action are by no means as fully explored by Massey as is waged labour. Other ideologies are repeatedly reduced in her work to issues of class. To take just one example: the ideology of the family is used by the Cornwall Industrial Development Association to argue that jobs should be located near women's homes, and Massey claims that this invocation of the family 'is actually about who taps a labour supply and how'.²³ Clearly the desire that women in waged labour remain in or at least near to the home has implications for labour supply, but the ideology of the family is far too complex and powerful to be reduced simply to a debate about labour availability, as Massey appears to do here.

Class is also seen by Cooke as the basic motor of political conflict. The foundation of his theory of regional state formation is what he sees as the inherently antagonistic relationship between capital and labour,²⁴ and the workplace is central to Cooke's understanding of political action; like Massey, his political geography is also an industrial geography. The cause of political allegiance, argues Cooke, is labour's experience of selling its power in spatially discontinuous labour markets. In his specification of the catalysts of class conflict-- threats to labour's control over the labour process, deskilling and fluctuating real and relative wage levels-- Cooke seems to argue that it is labour's experience of its own commodification which is crucial to its political awakening. He does mention briefly conflict based on reproductive issues, but his only discussion of

22. Massey, Spatial Divisions, p.120.

23. Massey, Spatial Divisions, p.231 (my emphasis).

24. P. Cooke, 'Class Interests, Regional Restructuring and State Formation in Wales', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 187-204.

politicisation processes concerns the workplace and involves politics of production.

There is a tendency inherent in [capitalism's] various labour processes towards the constant recomposition of its workforce either by substituting workers with other workers, workers with machines, or skills with other skills. It is in this context that workers develop consciousness of the politics of the workplace and the capacity through struggle to prevent their individual and collective recomposition at the behest of capital.²⁵

Other writers concur with Cooke's emphasis on labour markets and wage labour relations as more central to political behaviour than Masseyesque class structure alone.²⁶

There is however another aspect of Cooke's theory of politics. He suggests that while the workplace is central to the political awakening of individuals, the site of the forging of individuals into a collective political force is civil society. Following Urry again, but an Urry constructing a broad social theory rather than offering prescriptions for current research,²⁷ Cooke says that civil society:

is the realm in which individuals are capable of becoming conscious of a certain commonality of experience with others ... This is the precise field of class organisation in its political-ideological sense, where parties which have defined interests are in operation to actively bring about the formation of classes.²⁸

Civil society is the arena of social relations outside of the economy and the state. It is a concept crucial to locality-studies, particularly in their attempts to understand the contingent effects of social and economic restructuring on political action. For, as Cooke has

25. Cooke, Theories of Planning, p.234.

26. see for example J. Mark-Lawson, M. Savage and A. Warde, 'Gender and Local Politics: Struggles over Welfare Policies 1918-39', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group (London, 1985), pp.195-215.

27. J. Urry, The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society and the State (London, 1981).

28. Cooke, Theories of Planning, p.233.

noted, there is no correspondence between labour market type and party political support.²⁹ Rees argues that:

political activity which is an articulation of class structure does not develop from some pure type of 'consciousness of class position', but actually gains expression in forms which are mediated by the social relations which characterise particular localities ... In this way the spatial unevenness of productive relations coalesces with the local particularities of other dimensions of the social structure to generate characteristic forms of political expression in such communities.³⁰

It is this conceptualisation of causal local processes which underlies Savage's recent study of local working-class politics in Preston.³¹ Interestingly, the importance of local social bonding to which the use of the concept of civil society by the CURS project is addressed leads Savage to define 'locality' in terms of travel to work areas, rather than labour markets defined in terms of skill as well as spatially, since it is within travel to work areas that he argues most social ties are forged.³²

This reminds us that not all locality-studies follow Cooke's ideas,³³ and the main theoretical differences centre around interpretations of civil society and its political consequences. Studies of localities which have experienced political dealignment are especially keen to explore the role of civil society in breaking what was once thought to be an indissoluble link between class and

29. P. Cooke, 'The Changing Urban and Regional System in the United Kingdom', Regional Studies, 20 (1986), 243-51 (p.250).

30. Rees and others, Political Action, pp.4-5.

31. M. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940 (Cambridge, 1987).

32. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, p.40. The very idea of spatially discrete labour markets has recently been called into question; see M.G. Coombes, A.E. Green and D.W. Owen, 'Substantive Issues in the Definition of Locality: Evidence from Sub-Group Local Labour Market Areas in the West Midlands', Regional Studies, 22 (1988), 303-18.

33. for example, Savage and others dispute the importance of local labour markets to industrial location; 'Locality Research', p.37.

political allegiance; Johnston has calculated that in only 31 per cent of English constituencies at 1983 General Election was the vote within 10 per cent of what the local occupational class structure predicted it would be,³⁴ and this has encouraged him to look at 'the key actors in the local milieu ... and their manipulation of the local culture for their own political goals'.³⁵

Indeed, a growing number of voices insist that the social relations of civil society may significantly distort the expected political behaviour of social classes. Warde has gone so far as to suggest that where a strongly associational local community exists, 'structural class antagonisms may be negated'.³⁶ Arguing that 'locally, class structure produces hegemonic (ie. persuasive and leading) classes which, within certain parameters ... produce excessive environmental partisanship' (p.59) and align members of other classes behind them politically, he connects the 'local (community) power structure with electoral behaviour' (p.59), and Warde is not alone in his emphasis on the social and cultural rather than the industrial context of political allegiances. In a rather different way, Savage too has chosen to ignore the workplace and class determination of politics. Instead he explores the idea that voters' electoral allegiance is 'based primarily on some notion of how their locality is performing' in relation to the rest of the country.³⁷ Everyone regardless of their class location is more likely to vote for the party in power, suggests Savage, if they perceive their employment and housing prospects to have improved under the government; that is, given uneven

34. Johnston, The Geography of English Politics, p.33.

35. R. Johnston, 'The Neighbourhood Effect Revisited: A Spatial Science or Political Regionalism?', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 4 (1986), 41-55, (p.53).

36. A. Warde, 'Space, Class and Voting in Britain', in Politics, Geography and Social Stratification, edited by K. Hoggart and E. Kofman (London, 1986), pp.33-61, (p.55).

37. M. Savage, 'Understanding Political Alignments in Contemporary Britain: Do Localities Matter?', Political Geography Quarterly, 6 (1987), 53-76 (p.70).

economic development, locality may be more important to voting patterns than class.

These more recent theorisations of political behaviour among locality-study writers are unorthodox then in that they challenge the earlier argument of Massey and Cooke that people vote solely according to their class location; yet they continue to see class allegiance as a benchmark of political action. They conceive a working-class Tory vote or a middle-class Labour vote as deviations from a norm and attempt to explain the deviation, accepting the norm without comment. The realist concern for contingency and indeterminacy is beginning to modify the CURS theorisations of locality and politics then, but only to a limited degree; understandings of political action in locality-studies remain class-based.

Theories of local politics and the local state

This class-theoreticism is true too of other writers on the local state and local politics who, while not directly involved in the CURS project, nonetheless share its concern for local differentiation. The key works here are papers by Duncan and Goodwin and Byrne.

In their study of the local state, Duncan and Goodwin conceptualise the local state as an historically formed social relation between labour, which expresses locally developed class consciousness, and capital, which attempts to fragment labour's class solidarity by promoting the ideology of citizenship.³⁸ They argue that the form of the local state in a specific place depends on the local balance of class forces and on the degree of local class consciousness. An emphasis on class lies at the heart of

38. S.S. Duncan and M. Goodwin, 'The Local State and Restructuring Local Relations: Theory and Practice', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 157-88. Their ideas are developed further, but not fundamentally altered, in S.S. Duncan, M. Goodwin and S. Halford, 'Policy Variations in Local States: Uneven Development and Local Social Relations', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 12 (1988), 107-28.

Byrne's analysis of local proletarian politics too.³⁹ Byrne argues that the ultimate cause of working-class allegiance to the Labour Party is the class location of political activists; he attributes the radicalism of inter-war Chester-Le-Street, for example, entirely to the lack of local bourgeois opposition on the locality's Board of Guardians, as if that allowed the innate character of working-class politics to be seen in an unadulterated form (p.72).

This view of the local state which concentrates on local social relations is in striking contrast to most political geographers' understanding of the local state which, paradoxically, ignores local factors; their orthodoxy has been summarised by Johnston. 'Local government is part of the central state,' he writes. 'It has no independent existence, and the functions it is called upon to perform represent -- in both quantity and quality -- the perceptions of the role of local government held by those who control the central state apparatus.'⁴⁰ Both neo-Weberians such as Saunders and marxists like Cockburn share this view of the local state as no more than the executive arm of central government,⁴¹ and it is against this background that the compatibility of Byrne and Duncan and Goodwin's work with locality-studies becomes apparent. For they are especially interested in the geographical variability of local politics; their studies are without doubt part of that concern with the local and contingent which has shaped contemporary geography. Indeed Duncan even defines their work as an analysis of 'the spatial division of the state', a deliberate echo of

39. D. Byrne, 'Class and the Local State', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 61-82.

40. R.J. Johnston, 'Local Government and the State', in Progress in Political Geography, edited by M. Pacione (London, 1985), pp.152-76 (p.172).

41. P. Saunders, 'Rethinking Local Politics', in Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives, edited by M. Boddy and C. Fudge (London, 1984), pp.22-48; C. Cockburn, The Local State: Management of Cities and People (London, 1977). For a dissenting voice, see R. Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society (London, 1969), pp.52-3.

Massey's terminology.⁴² In the same spirit these writers also utilise empirical research to refine their comprehension of the local state; and Poplar and Poplarism provide key evidence for Duncan and Goodwin's argument. The next section will describe Poplar as it is presented in their work.

Representations of Poplar in theories of local politics

Poplar is recreated in Duncan and Goodwin's account through a conventional economic and social history of the place: a description of its industries and people. It takes the following form.

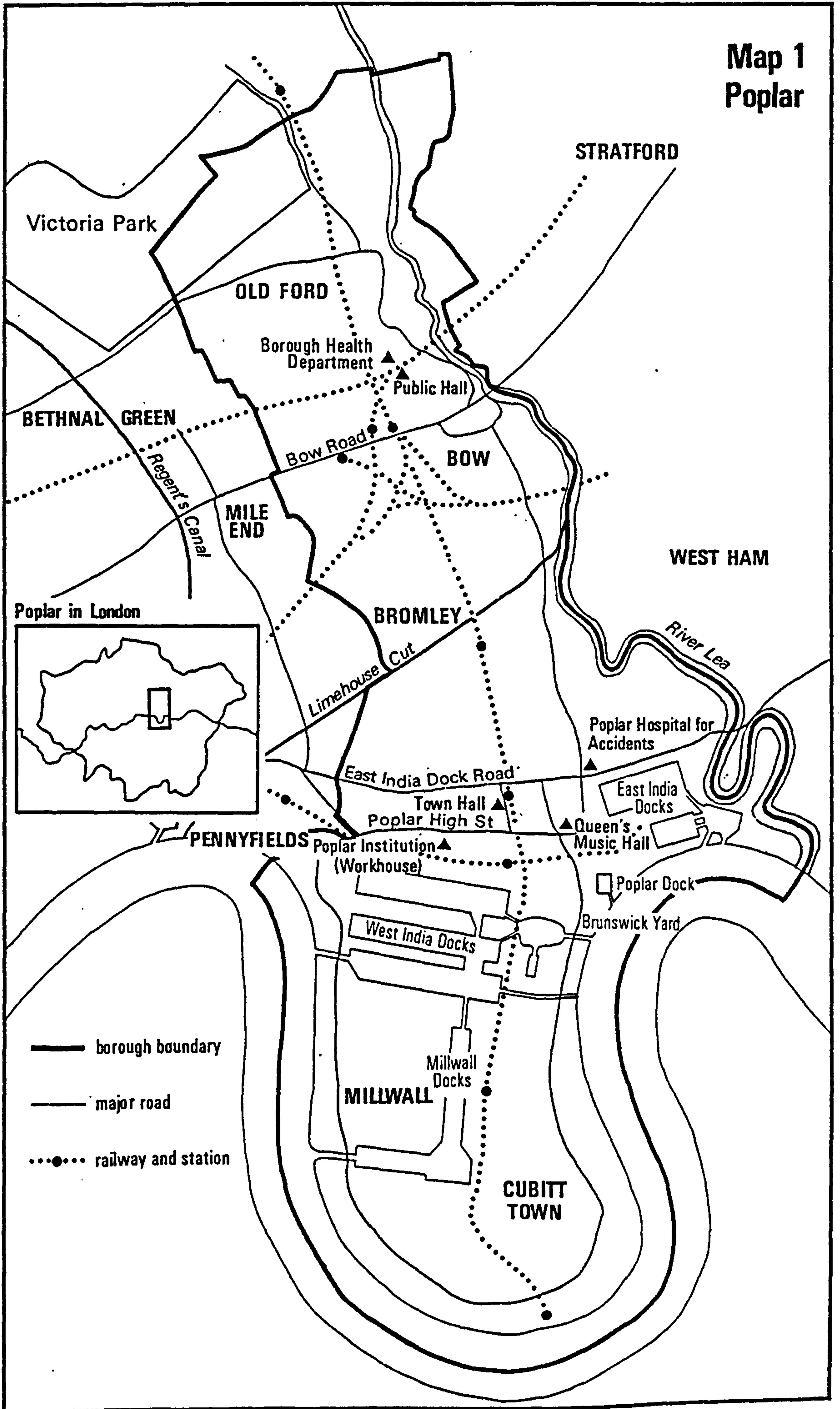
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Poplar was a small hamlet straddling a loop in the Thames, dependent for its livelihood on two shipbuilding yards. By the middle of the century its population was 47,000 and growing, reaching a peak of 169,000 by 1901. In the process, streets of slum cottages engulfed the farms and fields north and south of Poplar village, spreading to surround the wealthy suburb of Bow and halted at Old Ford only by the expanse of Victoria Park. The map overleaf shows the main landmarks created by this rapid development. Its causes were the construction of three massive dock complexes in the first half of the nineteenth century to cope with Britain's booming colonial trade, and the arrival of industries which located on the Isle of Dogs and in western Bow utilising the transport facilities of the area. Thus from its beginning, Poplar was implicated in world's economic system of trade and commerce.

The district became a metropolitan borough in 1899, its boundaries coinciding with those of the Poplar Poor Law Union established in 1834, as the map on the page after next shows. It is this unit of local government to which the word 'Poplar' refers in this thesis.

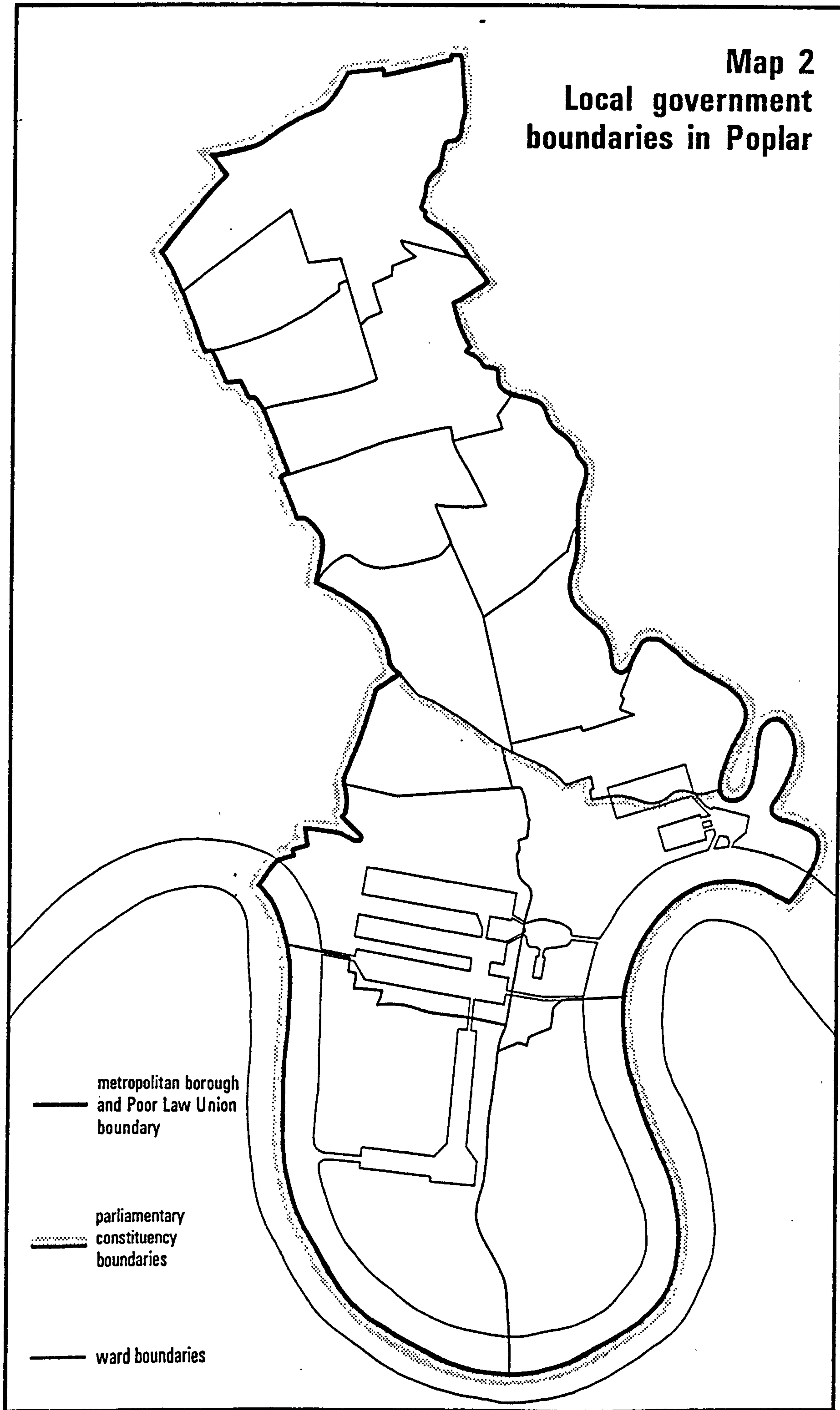
The borough was inhabited by the mainly unskilled workers in its docks and factories, for as the pollution, noise and crowds grew during its development almost all the middle-class inhabitants of Bow and old Poplar moved out

42. Duncan, What is Locality?, p.32.

Map 1
Poplar



Map 2
Local government
boundaries in Poplar



to leafier suburbs.⁴³ In the 1920s Poplar was the poorest borough in the metropolis. The New Survey of London Life and Labour found that no less than 24.1 per cent of the population were living below its harsh poverty line at the end of the decade.⁴⁴

This degree of poverty was created in large part by the occupational structure of the borough. The table on the next page shows the major occupations of Poplar workers. It demonstrates the overwhelming predominance of unskilled labour, and this was partly responsible for Poplar's poverty in two ways: low wages and casual employment. Low wages remained a problem throughout the decade, but casual labour was reduced, mainly through the efforts made to control the number of men looking for work each day in the docks. A registration scheme was introduced in 1920 which covered 62,000 men and by 1934 the number of dockers registered and thus able to seek work had fallen to 34,000.⁴⁵ Poplar council's policy of decasualising its workforce also helped to reduce the casual labour problem.

But the major cause of Poplar's poverty was unemployment.⁴⁶ Although Poplar never suffered as did places like Mardy or Jarrow, substantial numbers of people in the borough were unemployed in the 1920s. Job losses were caused partly by the vulnerability of Poplar's economy to depressions in world trade. At the height of the post-war slump, almost a quarter of Poplar's adult male insured

43. For the class composition of Poplar, see London School of Economics and Political Science, New Survey of London Life and Labour, 9 vols (London, 1930-35) (hereafter New Survey), IV, maps 2 and 3. For a more detailed history of Poplar's nineteenth century development, see F. Bedarida, 'Urban Growth and Social Structure in Nineteenth Century Poplar', London Journal 1 (1975), 159-88, and M. Rose, The East End of London (London, 1951).

44. New Survey, III, p.365.

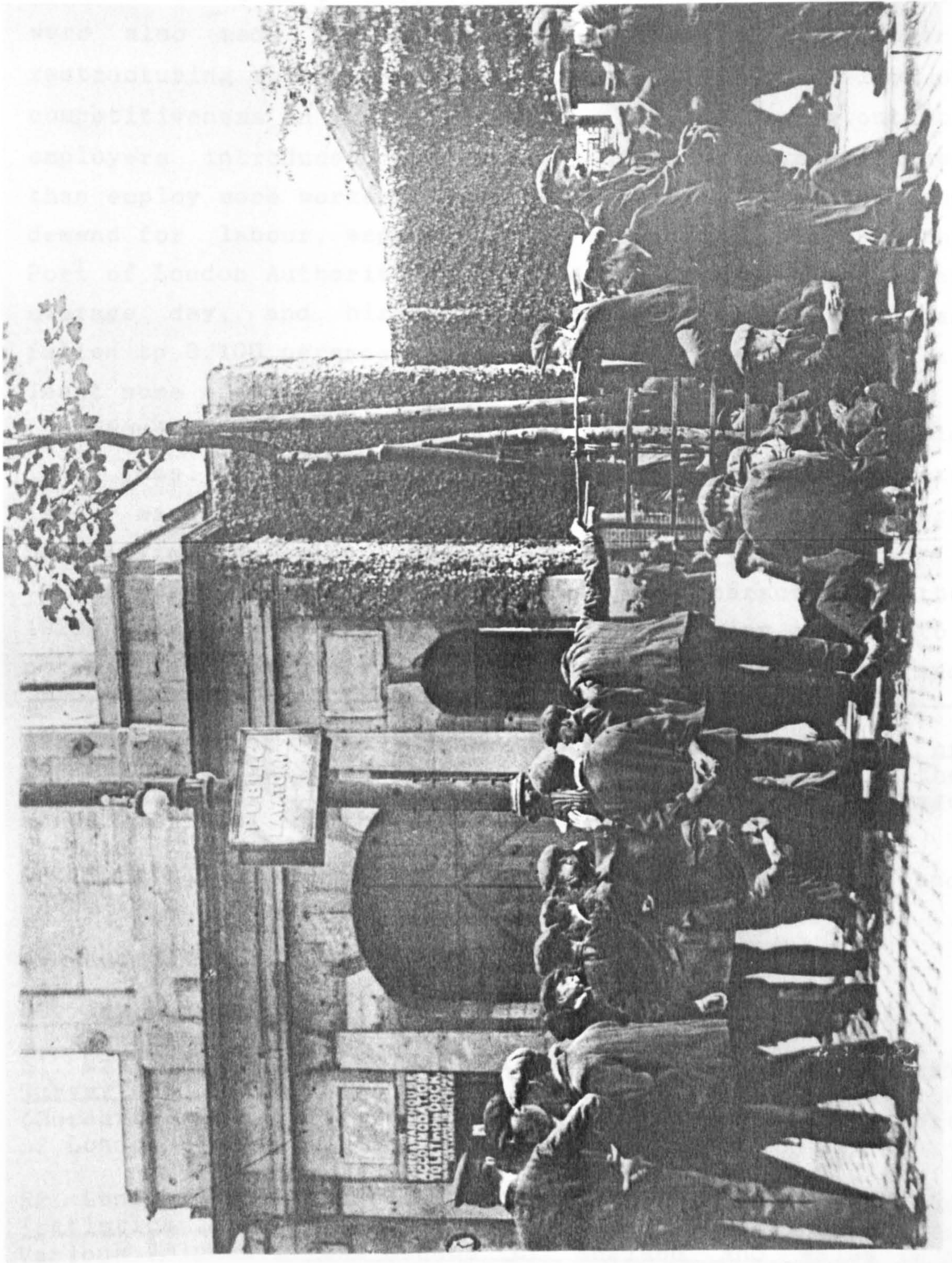
45. Port of London Registration Committee, Registration of Port Workers in the Port of London (London, 1934), pp.4-5.

46. New Survey, III, p.368.

TABLE 1
MAJOR OCCUPATIONS OF POPLAR WORKERS 1921-31

Census category	percentage of male workers	
	1921	1931
engineering	12.6	9.1
transport	26.5	24.3
rail	6.5	7.5
water	14.0	10.4
commercial and financial	6.1	7.8
wood and furniture	5.2	4.5
other labourers	15.0	20.9
subtotal	65.4	66.6
total	100.0	100.0
	percentage of female workers	
commercial and financial	6.4	6.2
textile goods	21.2	24.2
food, drink and tobacco	6.1	3.1
personal service	18.8	20.5
domestic service	7.9	8.5
packers	10.4	10.1
other labourers	2.6	8.9
subtotal	65.5	73.0
total	100.0	100.0

Source: Censuses 1921 and 1931.



Casual dockers waiting for work some time in the 1920s

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

population were out of work,⁴⁷ and throughout the 1920s in Poplar an average of 13.9 per cent of insured workers were signing on at Poplar Employment Exchange.⁴⁸ During the decade, Poplar factories, railways and workshops closed; in 1923 there were 4,600 shiprepairers in Poplar's yards but by 1930 there were only 1,710, for example.⁴⁹ But people were also made redundant as a result of employers restructuring their production in response to their lack of competitiveness in world markets. To increase output, employers introduced piecework systems of payment rather than employ more workers.⁵⁰ Mechanisation also reduced the demand for labour, especially in the docks. In 1920 the Port of London Authority employed 4,200 permanent men on an average day, and hired 4,600 casuals; by 1929 this had fallen to 3,100 permanent men and 1,393 casuals,⁵¹ and at least some of this decrease was due to mechanisation.

Those who were employed during the 1920s tended to hold local jobs. Poplar was one of the most spatially discrete labour markets in London, with two-thirds of its workers both living and labouring in the borough.⁵²

An essential part of east London's character in the 1920s was its politics; as a contemporary commentator noted, 'you have only to say ... "slums" and "poor" and

47. J.J. Astor and others, The Third Winter of Unemployment: The Report of an Enquiry undertaken in the Autumn of 1922 (London, 1923), p.328. The London average was 13 per cent and the national 16 per cent.

48. Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), LAB85/92 and LAB85/93.

49. New Survey, II, p.194.

50. New Survey, II, p.15.

51. British Library of Economic and Political Science, New Survey of London Life and Labour manuscript collection (hereafter New Survey MC), file 4/8, letters from the Port of London Authority, 15.12.1930 and 18.12.1930.

52. London County Council, Census 1921: Report upon the Statistics Relating to Greater London Contained in the Various Volumes of the Census of England and Wales 1921 (London, 1928), pp.28-9.

"Communism", and [people] think at once of the East End'.⁵³ In 1919 the Labour Party won majorities on many councils and Boards of Guardians in the East End and Poplar was no exception. There had been socialist groups active in the borough since the 1880s, agitating and winning widespread support,⁵⁴ but until their supporters had won the vote in the 1918 Representation of the People Act,⁵⁵ left-wing politicians did not reach office. In the 1919 local elections however, Poplar Labour Party won thirty-nine of the forty-two seats on the council and a majority of nineteen on the twenty-four member Board of Guardians, and it never looked back. The depth and breadth of support for Labour in Poplar was unusually strong and the tables on the next page give some indications of this.

The political episode for which Poplar was most famous in the 1920s was the gaoling of its councillors in 1921 for what soon became known as 'Poplarism'.⁵⁶ There were two aspects to Poplarism. The first was the relief paid to the poor of the borough. Relief was raised locally from the rates and Poplar's Guardians gave more generously and to more people than almost anywhere else in the country. Faced with massive unemployment in the post-war slump, Poplar council decided not to remit the precept from its rates to the various London-wide bodies which were legally entitled to it, and instead spent all its rates on the relief of the local poor. The London County Council, to whom part of the precept was owed, took the council to

53. T. Burke and P. Binder, The Real East End (London, 1932), p.3. The character of Poplar's politics will be detailed throughout the thesis; what follows is a brief introduction to its main features.

54. P. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Battle for London 1885-1914 (London, 1967).

55. George Lansbury, Poplar's most influential political figure, noted in his autobiography that until the 1918 Representation of the People Act, 'my meetings were full of voteless people'; G. Lansbury, My Life (London, 1928), p.110.

56. for detailed accounts of Poplarism, see N. Branson, Poplarism 1919-1925: George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt (London, 1979) and B. Keith-Lucas, 'Poplarism', Public Law, 7 (1962), 52-80.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE TURNOUT OF POPLAR AND LONDON VOTERS
IN LOCAL ELECTIONS 1919-28

		1919	1922	1925	1928
Borough council elections:	Poplar	39.2	51.5	47.8	34.8
	London	27.9	36.4	42.5	32.3
Board of Guardian elections:	Poplar	12.1	43.2	35.5	na
	London	7.7	22.8	19.8	na

Source: London County Council, London Statistics, 9 vols, (London, 1915-30).

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF LABOUR SEATS ON BOROUGH COUNCILS AND
BOARDS OF GUARDIANS IN LONDON AND POPLAR 1919-28

		1919	1922	1925	1928
borough council elections:	Poplar	92.9	85.7	85.7	85.7
	London	42.0	19.0	22.7	33.7
Board of Guardian elections:	Poplar	83.3	87.5	100	87.5
	London	28.6	25.0	46.6	46.2

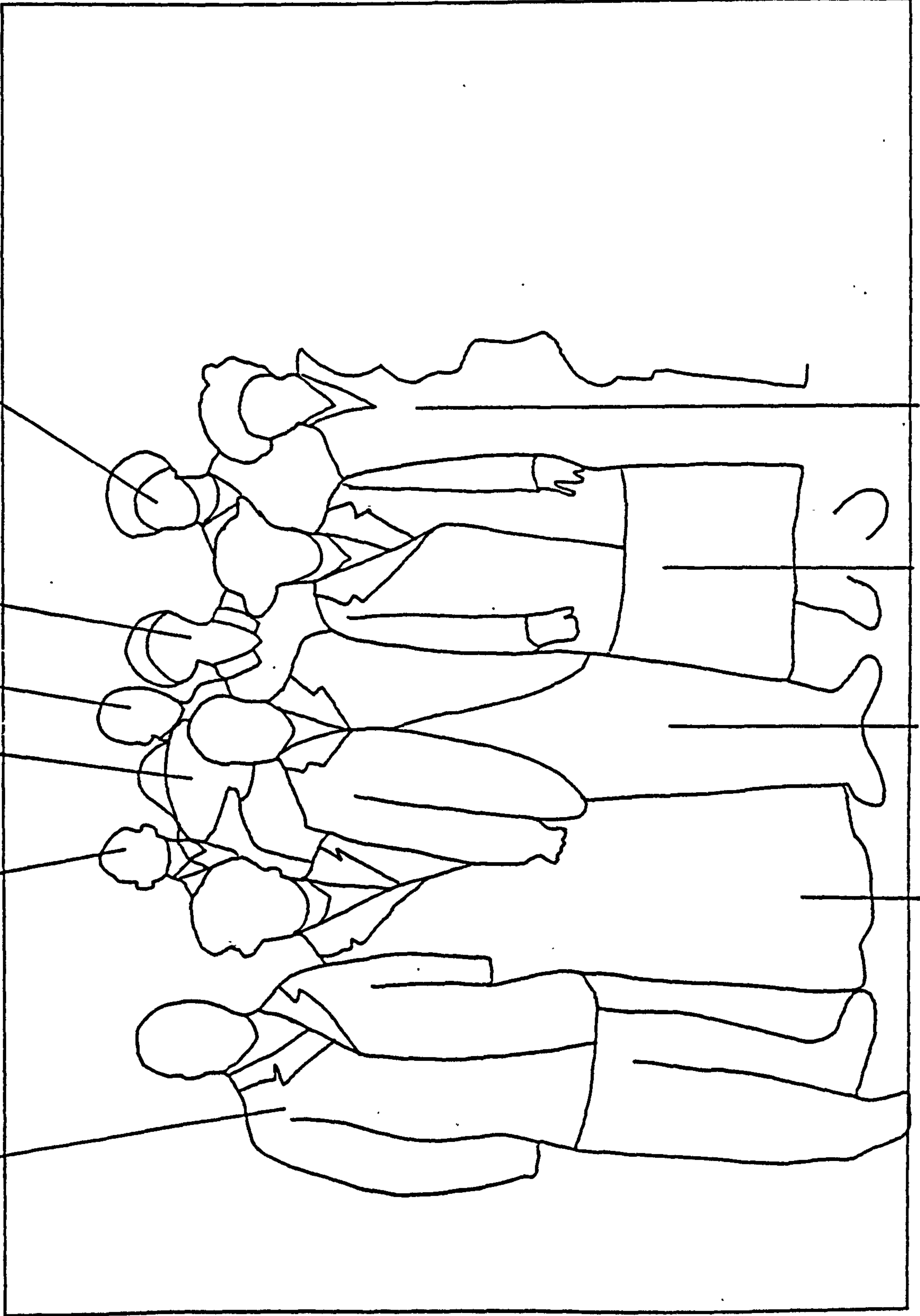
Source: Greater London Record Office (hereafter GLRO), London Labour Party archive (hereafter LLPA), Report of the Executive Committee (London, 1919-29), and the East London Advertiser 1919-28.



Poplar's councillors before going to gaol in 1921;
overleaf is a key to individuals

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

George Lansbury
 John Scurr
 Edgar Lansbury
 Julia Scurr
 Minnie Lansbury
 Susan Lawrence



Bessie Lansbury Sam March Jennie Mackay Nellie Cressall

The councillors in the photograph on the previous page

court in order to force them to pay, and when the council refused all but six councillors were sent to prison. The matter was resolved by the Ministry of Health agreeing to alter the system of funding relief so that wealthier boroughs would subsidise the poorer. The second aspect of Poplarism was a minimum wage policy. Poplar council employees were paid a minimum of £4 a week, until the House of Lords decreed this to be illegal in 1925.

As well as these spectacular clashes with the law, the commitment of Poplar council to municipal socialism began slowly to transform the borough's landscape. Slums were demolished and blocks of flats erected in their place; municipal swimming baths, wash-houses, laundrettes and maternity and child welfare clinics appeared; trees were planted and the streets were cleaned regularly.⁵⁷

According to Duncan and Goodwin, the industrial and social history of Poplar outlined above is enough to explain these radical Labour politics of the 1920s because it explains the creation of a working class in the area; for them, as has been argued above, class explains politics. Thus they see Poplar council chamber in the early 1920s as 'just another working-class institution ... part of a locally class-conscious, and popular, labour movement' (p.175). Duncan and Goodwin argue from this that the localities which followed Poplar's Poor Law policies were also 'areas of local working-class consciousness and organisation' (p.173). This assumption that Poplarism represented working-class consciousness and was inevitable given the class structure of the place is used by all writers on Poplar's politics.⁵⁸ It was also an assumption of Poplar Labour Party itself; after claiming that 'without some knowledge of the locality it is impossible to understand Poplarism', one of Poplar's Labour councillors

57. Poplar Metropolitan Borough Council (hereafter PMBC), The Work of Six Years, 1919-25 (Poplar, 1925).

58. Branson, Poplarism 1919-25; D. Stone, Municipal Socialism 1880-1982, Urban and Regional Studies Working Paper 44, (University of Sussex, 1985), pp.15-19.

in 1925 then went on to describe the borough's unemployment, reliance on casual labour, and poverty.⁵⁹

But how far does class structure and labour market type explain the political behaviour of parties and voters in Poplar?

A critique of theories of local working-class politics

From the above description, Poplar would seem to exemplify locality-studies' theories of locality and politics. The borough was almost wholly working-class, it was a spatially discrete labour market, and it was a Labour stronghold. The logic of Duncan, Goodwin, Byrne, Cooke and Massey appears to hold good. Or does it?

Poplar's labour market and class structure were in fact very little different from those of the rest of the East End,⁶⁰ or from other industrial areas of inner London. Although Poplar's labour market was spatially distinct, it was not the most discrete in London,⁶¹ and in terms of its unskilled and often casual character it was typical of all other riverside London boroughs. Nor was Poplar's level of unemployment unusual in London.⁶² Pointing to structural characteristics like class, labour market or unemployment simply does not explain why only Poplar's council went to gaol in 1921. In its attempts to explain this radicalism therefore, this thesis stresses aspects of Poplar's society

59. C.W. Key, Red Poplar: Six Years of Socialist Rule (London, 1925), p.5.

60. The East End as a whole was 'a distinct economic and social region within Greater London'; J.A. Gillespie, 'Economic and Political Change in the East End of London During the 1920s', (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1984), p.22.

61. Four other London boroughs (of a total of twenty seven) had a greater percentage of their residents working in their home borough than did Poplar; London County Council, Census 1921, pp.28-29.

62. Ten districts in Greater London had unemployment rates among adult insured men of twenty per cent or above in 1922; Astor and others, The Third Winter of Unemployment, p.328.

and culture other than the workplace,⁶³ and as a result its portrait of the locality will be very different to the one usually offered.

The rest of this section explores the failure of locality-studies to comprehend political action in more detail, and argues that it stems from two features common to the theorisations of local working-class politics so far discussed: their class theoreticism and their structural epistemology.

The difficulties with class theoreticism

That locality-studies remain class theoretical has already been noted. Working-class support for the Labour Party is in the last instance assumed to be based on the class location of voters and activists, regardless of the processes of civil society, and all Labour Party policies are assumed to stem from a class politics. Despite Cooke's avowal that to read off political allegiance from class membership is 'absurdly reductionist, essentialist, functionalist and rationalistic',⁶⁴ class is still the prime concern of these writers. Consider this passage from Cooke himself:

Struggles in which production relations [were] not the sole determinants ... are constrained by the stage of development and so each round of capitalist development provides the conditions for struggles out of which different kinds of working class, intermediate class or capitalist class will be formed. Similarly, spatial unevenness in the development process will aid the formation of different kinds of class in different regions and localities (to the extent that they are dominated by different labour markets).⁶⁵

This implies that capital both maps out the battlefield and forms up the armies of social struggle. Even Urry, whose 'causal entities' could quite easily be theorised as

63. Chapter II justifies this neglect of the workplace in much more detail.

64. Cooke, Theories of Planning, p.228.

65. Cooke, Theories of Planning, pp.232-33.

patriarchy,⁶⁶ for example, or racism, divides social struggle into 'class struggle' and 'popular struggle', the latter category being a catch-all concept for all struggles which are not based on class issues.⁶⁷ Urry has little interest in conceptualising 'popular struggles' in their own terms.

If the radicalism of locality-studies lay in its rejection of traditional industrial location theory by emphasising capital's historically and geographically variable development then, their class-based model of the resulting political behaviour was much more conventional. Orthodox political science had long held the fundamental cause of political allegiance in Britain to be social class, with manual workers voting Labour and white-collar workers voting Conservative, and a relatively stable relationship between class and party was thought to exist.⁶⁸ The major difficulty which this poses in the work of writers like Massey, Cooke and Duncan and Goodwin is a conflation of class and party; an abstract relationship to the means of production is confused with loyalty to a specific politics.

Class and party should be disentangled because they are quite different entities. The means of unpicking the knot is to define exactly what is meant by class politics. Savage has attempted this.

In capitalist society the working-class can be defined as all those people separated from the means of their subsistence. Hence working-class interests lie in the reduction of the insecurity which results from this separation ... the reduction of insecurity is tied up with the need to undermine the commodity status of labour power ... It primarily involved three elements: the need to detach income from the law of the market; the need to ensure job security; and the need to make the

66. for a brief consideration of the historical-geographical intersection of patriarchal and capitalist entities, see L. McDowell and D. Massey, 'A Woman's Place?', in Geography Matters!, edited by D. Massey and J. Allen (Cambridge, 1984), pp.128-47.

67. Urry, The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies, pp.67-8.

68. for a critique of this orthodoxy, see J.E. Cronin, Labour and Society in Britain 1918-1979 (London, 1984).

reproduction of labour power non-dependent (or less dependent) on market-based services.⁶⁹

Although, for reasons outlined below, this thesis rejects Savage's use of objective class interests, he draws from the arguments in this passage a conclusion which is highly relevant to the claims being made here. This is that, contra the writers on local politics discussed above, party politics and class politics are not the same thing. Of the strategies of politics which Savage argues develop from this class interest, only one, which he terms statist, necessarily involves political action. This distinction between class and party will be of particular relevance to the discussion of the politics of class in Poplar in chapter II.

If not all class politics are party politics then, neither are all party politics class politics, and this is the second reason for distinguishing class from party. Labour Party policies are shaped by more than just class interests, however defined, and many locality studies are beginning to realise this and look elsewhere for their understanding of local politics, to community, culture, the household. The feminist critique of locality studies is especially telling on this point. As Bowlby, Foord and McDowell argue, in the locality-inspired focus on class and waged labour, 'other social relations such as those based on gender, race or religion ... remain both secondary and largely untheorised'.⁷⁰ They also criticise the equation of locality with labour market. As they say, 'we need to examine, rather than assume, the degree to which the spatial organisation of non-workplace social relations derives from or is related to labour market relations' (p.329). Thus issues such as collective consumption patterns and 'local, cultural effects',⁷¹ as well as

69. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, p.17.

70. S. Bowlby, J. Foord and L. McDowell, 'The Place of Gender in Locality Studies', Area, 18 (1986), 327-331 (p.329).

71. A. Warde, 'Spatial Change, Politics and the Division of Labour', in Spatial Structures and Social Relations, edited by Gregory and Urry, pp.190-212 (p.201).

household organisation,⁷² have been cited in the most recent work on locality and politics as crucial to politicisation processes.

This acknowledgement of the variety of politics is in part a reflection of the diversity of political movements in existence today to which class-based analyses are simply irrelevant. This point has been argued by Cohen.

The concept of class can certainly point to forms of domination, inequity and potential social struggles over the division and control of labour time. Yet it is unable to provide the exclusive referent for an alternative vision of society or even for the dynamics of contestation and transformation in the present. More significant, the Marxian concepts of class, totality, system and history cannot serve as the standpoint from which to unify, theoretically or practically, the plurality of social struggles and movements in contemporary society.⁷³

Ethnic struggles, the radical women's movement, the peace campaign, green politics, nationalist groups -- all of these make little reference to class in their manifestoes. And if politics now cannot be reduced to class, there is no reason to assume automatically that politics sixty years ago should be, as writers on Poplar do. A major theme of this thesis is precisely the multiplicity of influences on Poplar's political parties.

The problem of structuralism

A much more radical problem than this class-theoreticism (which could be overcome by paying greater attention to the diversity of causal entities) is the structuralism of locality studies. Structuralism delves beneath the conscious designs of active human subjects in order to ascertain the logic binding social activity together in enduring structures. Its presence is not confined to the more Marxist authors like Cooke or Massey; structuralism,

72. R.E. Pahl, 'The Restructuring of Capital, the Local Political Economy and Household Work Strategies', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by Gregory and Urry, pp.242-264. See also the essays in Class and Space: The Making of Urban Society, edited by N. Thrift and P. Williams (London, 1987).

73. J.L. Cohen, Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory (Oxford, 1983), p.xii.

in its realist guise, is the very foundation stone of locality studies. The pervasive assumption that working-class people are somehow naturally socialistic, the idea that, left to themselves, workers are inherently radical, the suggestion that the objective interests of working-class people can be defined on the basis of a theory of class rather than by paying attention to what people themselves want, are all structuralist strategies. The more recent arguments of locality-studies that certain social structures encourage certain kinds of politics are also structural; they assume a logic of behaviour based on structures beyond the ken of people (except academics of course). Hoggart and Kofman for example speak of 'local systems of social stratification and interaction' as the causes of local political action;⁷⁴ even Savage's subtle account of the specific aspects of social structure which encourage working-class politics contains few voices of people, for he is concerned only with structural change and its political impact.⁷⁵

There are two objections to this structuralism, both based upon its marginalisation of human agency.

The first concerns the ontological status of structures themselves. Structuralist accounts assume that structures exist independent of people's consciousness of them. Counter to this is the argument that things are real only if people believe them to be so. This idea -- that structures are not entities which can exist outside of human consciousness -- has recently been argued by the historian Stedman Jones. He takes that structure dearest to the hearts of locality study theorists, class, and argues that its definition has changed historically, not because of changing structural realities but because people have conceptualised it differently at different historical periods. 'Because there are different languages of class, one should not proceed upon the assumption that "class" as an elementary counter of official social description,

74. K. Hoggart and E. Kofman, 'Introduction', in Politics, Geography and Social Stratification, edited by K. Hoggart and E. Kofman (London, 1986), pp.1-15 (p.9).

75. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics.

"class" as an effect of discourse about distribution or production relations, "class" as the summary of a cluster of culturally signifying practices or "class" as a species of political or ideological self-definition, all share a reference point in an anterior social reality'.⁷⁶ Indeed, as Calhoun has noted, the notion of an inherently radical working-class which pervades modern studies of 1920s Poplar was itself encouraged more by the context in which Marx was writing than by his privileged insight into the true nature of the proletariat.⁷⁷ Stedman Jones concludes his discussion of the nature of class by deciding that in his work, as in this thesis, "class" is treated as a discursive rather than as an ontological reality, the central effort being made to explain languages of class from the nature of politics rather than the character of politics from the nature of class' (p.8).

If the ontology of structuralism is unacceptable then, the focus of research into the polity must be the politicians, political activists and voters themselves. Connolly has argued just that. As he says, 'because context-specific concepts and beliefs are constituent ingredients of social life and because the participants sharing those ideas have the capacity to criticise them through reasoned judgement, an interpretive dimension must be incorporated into any viable account of political life.'⁷⁸ People think, judge and act. They do so within certain constraints of course; the point here is that structuralist studies ignore this human creativity altogether. In a sense, structuralists do not take political discourse seriously enough. In contrast, this thesis tries to discover why people deliberately chose to support Poplar Labour Party.

76. G. Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History 1832-1982 (Cambridge, 1983), pp.7-8.

77. C. Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution (Oxford, 1982).

78. W.E. Connolly, Appearance and Reality in Politics (Cambridge, 1981), p.18.

A consequence of the claim that people -- voters -- are active subjects is the elevated importance of politicisation processes. If working-class people interpret politics rather than being impelled by their class position to vote Labour, the means by which Labour (or other parties) manage to win their support become central to political analysis. Yet locality-studies neglect this crucial process, and this is the second reason for rejecting their structuralism. Mark-Lawson, Savage and Warde, for example, present a fascinating study of the relationship between local gender relations and local politics in Nelson, Preston and Lancaster between the wars, arguing that the varying extent and nature of women's involvement in the labour market among these towns shaped the differing policies of local Labour Parties.⁷⁹ They proceed by defining women's objective interests, correlating these to Labour Party policies and the degree of female activity in the Parties, and then positing paid labour as the structure which explains these patterns. Missing from this study are the arguments and motivations of the women and politicians of these localities; local labour patterns move in a mysterious way to form political activity. Their conclusions may well be correct, but their reasoning seems inadequate in its lack of interest in the precise processes by which structure becomes action.

Byrne does consider politicisation, despite his belief in an innate proletarian socialism. He sees British working-class reformism as the key to the nature of political struggle in this country, and describes the specific social institutions which propagated it in inter-war Gateshead: the socialist clubs, newspapers, choirs, dramatic troupes and so on.⁸⁰ This interest in the social processes by which political understandings are reproduced is central to this thesis, for the Labour Party in Poplar had worked hard for thirty years to persuade its constituents to support it, and, as the thesis will show,

79. Mark-Lawson, Savage and Warde, 'Gender and Local Politics', pp.195-215.

80. Byrne, 'Class and the Local State', p.71.

continued actively to seek their allegiance into the 1920s. It relied neither on inherent class loyalty nor on structural changes in the locality to reach office, but on discussion, propaganda and persuasion.

The problematic nature of collective action has been recognised ever since the seminal work of Olson on the 'free rider problem' which showed that 'unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other form of special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests'.⁸¹ Offe and Wiesenenthal have considered the ways in which working-class organisations must operate in order to overcome this inertia.⁸² They argue that, in contrast to capitalists whose collective action is determined in a relatively simple manner by a 'willingness to pay', the logic of working-class unity is by no means as obvious and involves a 'willingness to act' (p.80). Action requires both the formation and the expression of common interests, and the process which can achieve this is 'dialogical', according to Offe and Wiesenenthal; that is, it requires constant debate, participation and involvement by the working class. This point has been taken up by certain theorists of locality. Warde for example suggests that processes of 'political communication' are crucial to local politics,⁸³ and Lash and Urry have listed some of the conditions they feel are necessary if collective action is to take place;⁸⁴ they in fact consider the perceptions of potential actors to be an important catalyst of action.

81. M. Olson, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, revised edition, (New York, 1971), p.2.

82. C. Offe and H. Wiesenenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organisational Form', Political Power and Social Theory, 1 (1980), 67-115.

83. Warde, 'Space, Class and Voting in Britain', p.58.

84. S. Lash and J. Urry, 'The New Marxism of Collective Action: A Critical Analysis', Sociology, 18 (1984), 33-50.

This discussion of politicisation processes and the ideas and perceptions of people has developed from the premise that human agency is of fundamental importance to politics. That locality studies do not share this priority is clear from Newby's description of localities as 'laboratories' in which social scientists can carry out their experiments;⁸⁵ this reduces the people in those localities to the status of guinea pigs, an inaccurate (and arrogant) categorisation. In exploring further just how this concern for human creativity might be incorporated into a new understanding of 'locality', this thesis makes a fundamental ontological break with locality studies;⁸⁶ it does so by drawing upon a certain conceptualisation of culture.

But first a comment on why Poplar was chosen as a case study, a comment relevant at this point because the main reason for the choice was the theoretical doubts developed above about the ways in which radical localities were being explained in contemporary geography (although the desire to recover and celebrate a radical local government at a time of increasing central government control over local authorities was also important). Poplar and its politics are used as the archetype of class-theoretical and structural theories of politically radical places; Poplar was structurally more working-class than other areas it is (erroneously) suggested, and it is implied by Duncan and Goodwin and Byrne that the nature of working-class politics can therefore be seen most clearly there. If Poplar's politics can be better explained in some other theoretical framework, orthodox accounts of locality and politics, not only of Poplar but more generally, will have been proved inadequate and severe doubts must be entertained about

85. H. Newby, 'Locality and Rurality: The Restructuring of Rural Social Relations', Regional Studies, 20 (1986), 209-215 (p.214).

86. It is interesting to note however that some studies of locality are moving in a similar direction. Duncan for example mentions 'a "spatial division of imagined communities"; that is people's own belief in locality even where actual local social interactions are unimportant'; What is Locality?, (p.32).

their explanatory powers. Poplar was thus chosen as the focus of this thesis because it is the case study exemplar of these current orthodoxies.

This chapter now turns to an alternative theoretical framework in which to place the study of local political processes.

Culture

'Culture' is emerging as a term only marginally less popular than 'locality' among geographers. Like locality however, its very popularity is creating theoretical chaos. Is 'culture' the equivalent of tradition? of landscape? of material practices? of human interaction with the natural environment?⁸⁷ Often it seems to be merely a residual category used to explain everything otherwise inexplicable in a locality study.⁸⁸ This conceptual confusion is useless for advancing our knowledge of local social and political processes; a clear definition of culture is necessary, and a clear awareness of what the concept can and cannot achieve. The next section defines the meaning of culture in this study.

A concept of culture

This thesis follows the definition of culture expounded by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz because it overcomes the three fundamental flaws of locality studies:

87. for these various uses of the term, see Johnston, The Geography of English Politics, p.292; S. Daniels, 'Landscaping for a Manufacturer: Humphrey Repton's Commission for Benjamin Gott at Annley in 1809-10', Journal of Historical Geography, 7 (1981), 379-96; M. Savage, Cultures of Difference, forthcoming Open University course unit; D. Cosgrove, 'Towards a Radical Cultural Geography: Problems of Theory', Antipode, 15 (1983), 1-11. No definition at all is offered by D. Gregory and D. Ley, 'Culture's Geographies', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 6 (1988), 115-16.

88. for example G. Rees, H. Williamson and V. Winckler, 'Employers' Recruitment/Training Strategies and Local Economic Restructuring: The Case of the South Wales Coalfield', paper presented at the Sixth Urban Change and Conflict Conference, Canterbury, 1987.

their neglect of non-class politics, their uninterest in the politicisation process, and their exclusion of people's thought and creativity. These claims will now be justified.

The classic statement of Geertz's understanding of culture comes from his 1973 collection of essays.

The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical.⁸⁹

This broad concern with meaning of all kinds challenges locality-studies. It ends the theoretical imperialism of 'class' because it permits consideration of 'a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures'.⁹⁰ Consideration of meaning also invokes agency and social action, for culture is an 'acted document', and acted documents of course require actors.⁹¹

This social grounding of 'culture' distinguishes Geertz's use of the word 'structure' from its use in locality studies. Geertz argues that meanings are socially established; social behaviour signifies and social action is also symbolic action. Thus 'structures' of meaning do not exist behind the backs of people, but are the very essence of people themselves, and indeed one of Geertz's abiding interests is the different conceptions of personhood in different cultures.⁹² Geertz cannot be described as structuralist then, and his interest in social action and process clearly opens a theoretical space within which to answer the neglect of politicisation processes in locality studies.

89. C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York, 1973), p.5.

90. Interpretation of Cultures, p.10 (my emphasis).

91. Interpretation of Cultures, p.10.

92. see for example 'Person, Time and Conduct in Bali', in The Interpretations of Culture, pp.360-411.

If the Geertzian notion of culture is able to overcome the problems of structuralism earlier argued to be at the heart of locality studies by foregrounding agency, process and the diversity of structures of meaning, it is reasonable to ask why his work is not more widely known and drawn upon. Certainly culture has been considered by some writers on politics, but it has been rejected by them. In order both to defend the use of the concept here and to further explore its implications for research, their critique will now be faced and responded to.

One major criticism of cultural interpretations of politics concerns the method of retrieving a culture; that is discussed in the last section of this chapter. Another critical comment often made is that culture is too overdetermining a concept. There are two aspects to this critique; the first suggests that culture is formulated as so pervasive a phenomenon that it ends up explaining everything away rather than simply explaining, and the second argues that the notion of culture neglects material and structural constraints.⁹³

Both of these points can be refuted; indeed a main aim of this thesis is to do just that. The assumption on which they are based is that culture is a determining structure, a causal entity. That is precisely what it is not. 'Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly -- that is, thickly -- described'.⁹⁴ As Cohen argues, following Geertz,

culture, constituted by symbols, does not impose itself in such a way as to determine that all its adherents should make the same sense of the world.

93. see M. Harris, Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture (New York, 1979); G. Rees, 'Coalfield Culture and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike: A Reply to Sunley', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 4 (1986), 469-476; Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, pp.3-4; P. Shankman, 'The Thick and the Thin: On the Interpretive Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz', Current Anthropology, 25 (1984), 261-79; R.G. Walters, 'Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and the Historians', Social Research, 47 (1980), 537-56.

94. Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, p.14.

Rather, it merely gives them the capacity to make sense and, if they tend to make a similar kind of sense it is not because of any deterministic influence but because they are doing so with the same symbols.⁹⁵

Using Geertz's linguistic metaphor, culture is not a novel or a poem but a grammar; to simplify, it shapes rather than determines what is said. Thus its use in the arena of politics does not involve a denial of the importance of material interests, external constraints, individuals' ambitions, accidents, social structure; all these and more influence what is expressed, and the impact of such constraints on Poplar Labour Party's changing politics is explored in the final chapter. But expressions are phrased in a cultural language which requires interpretation; and, until that act of translation, what is being said must remain obscure.

Nor is culture a coherent and consistent world view, a fault of which Savage accuses it. Geertz describes culture as an 'octopus, whose tentacles are in large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another'.⁹⁶ There are inconsistencies, as the exploration of Poplar's labour movement in chapter II explores, and divisions, as the chapters on Poplar's neighbourhoods and religions suggest. There were also aspects of Poplar's culture wholly irrelevant to the borough's politics. In Poplar, for example, the cockney love of flowers did not develop into a major part of the council's municipal socialism, although this was not the case in south London.⁹⁷ The non-determining nature of culture is considered in the final chapter, where it is argued that culture and politics are only contingently related.

Culture as a concept thus has the potential to increase our understanding of politics and political action. The

95. A.P. Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community (London, 1985), p.16.

96. Interpretation of Cultures, p.408.

97. see F. Brockway, Bermondsey Story: The Life of Alfred Salter (London, 1949).

next section considers its contribution to ideas of locality.

Culture and geography

There are two ways in which geography and the Geertzian notion of culture intersect. The first involves the nature of a 'locality'.

The interpretive approach of this thesis, based on Geertz's formulation of culture, makes the use of 'locality' defined in structural terms as a labour market impossible. Instead, its conceptualisation of locality is one based on people's identification of themselves with a particular place in contrast to other places: a localism, which is itself a cultural phenomenon. The various ways in which this identification was achieved in Poplar will be discussed throughout the thesis, and synthesised in the concluding chapter.

The second way in which culture has a geography is in its spatial specificity. Geertz is concerned with meaning but also with geography, for as he has argued, culture is essentially 'local knowledge'; it varies between places and might be described as 'local frames of awareness'.⁹⁸ Geertz's use of the term 'local' is somewhat loose to a geographer's eyes; he compares cultures across continents rather than between regions or towns. But his work can be made more geographically sensitive, more aware of the cultural variations between places close to each other, if its recognition of the spatial specificity of a culture is combined with its vision of culture as the uncoordinated tentacles of an octopus. This point will now be developed.

Although Geertz does not do so, it can be argued that if a culture is not a monolithic whole, if it is contradictory, one of its contradictions may be the geographically uneven spread of each of its tentacles. Different components of a culture may be present to differing degrees in different places. The specific configurations of the components of a culture in different locations may then be

98. C. Geertz, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology (New York, 1983), p.6.

said to create small-scale local knowledges, variations on the theme tune of Geertz's larger scale notion of culture. An apt analogy is with a cake with several layers of variable thickness and different flavours: a slice through the cake will give a singular combination of flavours and therefore have a unique taste. In the same way, the culture of a specific place can be seen as a summation of its unique configuration of geographically variable knowledges and awarenesses.⁹⁹

This notion of cultural geography as the intersection in a particular place of various cultural sensibilities underlies the exploration of Poplar's culture in this thesis; the variable presences in Poplar of the constituent elements of its culture are charted in the next four chapters. Before that task begins, the methodology used to retrieve and present that culture must be outlined.

Culture and method

As was noted above, a common criticism of the concept of culture is one of method: how is it possible to retrieve the thoughts and ideas of people long dead, particularly those who left no records behind them? And how can the historian be sure that when evidence does exist, it accurately represents those ideas?¹⁰⁰ These are simple but fundamental questions and require careful answers. One response would be to argue that no matter how difficult the task of excavating a past culture is, the problems involved are of lesser weight than the rejection of human agency implied in structuralist accounts. While this answer may

99. This metaphor has obvious similarities to the geological metaphor used by Doreen Massey to clarify her notion of rounds of investment in 'In What Sense a Regional Problem?', pp.234-5. These similarities are coincidental and are not meant to suggest that the notion used here of cultural layers is the same as Massey's sedimentation of capital.

100. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, pp.3-4; M. McAuley, 'Political Culture and Communist Politics: One Step Forward and Two Steps Back', in Political Culture and Communist Studies, edited by A. Brown (London, 1984), pp13-39.

satisfy anti-structuralists, it will not wash with the structuralists themselves, and it is therefore necessary to consider the methodology of the interpretive approach to politics adopted here in some detail.

Geertz argues that culture is 'socially established structures of meaning',¹⁰¹ and it is precisely the social nature of culture which allows its retrieval. For a structure of meaning is shared and public, 'its natural habitat is the house-yard, the marketplace, and the town square',¹⁰² and thus by surveying the range of evidence which does exist and trying to discern patterns, recurring themes, repeated events, common ideas, a culture may be recovered. The retrieval of local or past cultures is not a question of rediscovering individual thoughts, as critics imply, but a question of detecting collective meanings. The task is not an easy one; even if evidence has survived, Geertz has described its interpretation as being 'like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript -- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries ... written not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour'.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, a reading is possible.

The 'manuscripts' used in this thesis include local and national newspapers, the archives and publications of Poplar's organisations, biographies and autobiographies, oral history interviews with people living in the borough in the 1920s, personal papers and central government records, photographs and handbills, statistics and novels about the place.¹⁰⁴ The aim has been to detect that 'local turn of mind', that 'communal sensibility',¹⁰⁵ of which

101. Interpretation of Cultures, p.12.

102. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, p.360.

103. Interpretation of Cultures, p.10.

104. A major omission is the minutes of Poplar Labour Party meetings. Due to some false information, it was assumed at the beginning of the research that they were available; in fact they had been destroyed in the bombing of the Second World War.

105. Local Knowledge, p.12



Geertz speaks by finding the shared meanings which social life in Poplar embodied, for 'it is through the flow of behaviour -- or, more precisely, social action -- that cultural forms find articulation'.¹⁰⁶ One especially important technique has been the reconstruction of the biographies of Poplar's public figures.

Biographies have several purposes. They celebrate the lives of individual people and thus assert the importance of human agency to social and political life. They also display the structure of Poplar's civil society and culture by revealing the socialisation of individuals into their local milieu,¹⁰⁷ and this is true even of the lives of those charismatic individuals who seem to be by definition extraordinary. Shils has argued that charisma is 'constituted by the high intensity with which certain vital, crucial qualities are manifested ... The charismatic quality of an individual as perceived by others, or himself, lies in what is thought to be his connection with ... some very central feature of man's [sic] existence'.¹⁰⁸ Shils thus argues that the appeal of a charismatic individual in a sense lies in their typicality, in their close contact with what is believed to be a 'vital layer' (p.201) of local life, in their ability to tap people's fundamental faiths. This was recognised by a writer discussing perhaps Poplar's most charismatic figure, the politician George Lansbury.

George Lansbury is the patron saint of Poplar. He is, moreover, its articulate. If it were possible for a city or a borough to take on human shape or qualities, then Poplar would be what you know George Lansbury to be. They love each other.¹⁰⁹

Biography is important evidence of a place's culture, and it does not matter too much that (until recently) most

106. Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, p.17.

107. D. Bertaux, Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences (London, 1981).

108. E. Shils, 'Charisma, Order and Status', American Sociological Review, 30 (1965), 199-213 (p.201).

109. W.H. Lax, Lax, His Book: The Autobiography of Lax of Poplar (London, 1937), p.291.

biographies were of public, and by that criteria unusual, people.

Method then is not an insuperable hurdle in the quest to recover a culture; that structuralists see it as such is a reflection of what they understand the task of historians to be. 'History' in locality studies means change; more accurately, it means capitalist restructuring. The history of places is the interaction of successive spatial divisions of labour; the motor of history is capitalism's contradictory search for an increasing rate of accumulation; history is the narrative of this search. Yet understanding change is not the only task of a truly historical project. History is not only the explanation of a linear flow of change; it also involves the understanding of meaning, of historically-specific discourse, of the feel and texture of a period.¹¹⁰ The very method of historical research, its careful interpretations of documents, is concerned with the translation of meaning from one frame of reference to another, and this is the aim of Geertz's anthropology too, 'this catching of "their" views in "our" vocabulary' as he describes it.¹¹¹ It is this hermeneutic task for which locality studies have no time. In part this is so because their sources are very recent and the interpretation of post-1945 travel to work area data does not require a great leap of imagination; but more fundamentally it is because of the structuralist ontology of locality studies and their abstraction of causal entities from periods and places.

Poplar's culture can be retrieved, then, and it is represented in this thesis through discussion of five of its constituent parts which seem to be especially relevant to the politics of Poplar people: class, citizenship, neighbourliness, religion and gender. Following Geertz's terminology, each of these parts is termed a 'communal sensibility'.¹¹² In each chapter (except the second), the

110. F. Driver, 'The Uses of History in Contemporary Human Geography', paper presented at the annual conference of the Institute of British Geographers, University of Loughborough, January 1988.

111. Local Knowledge, p.10.

112. Local Knowledge, p.12.

abstract outlines of the sensibility in question are recounted first, and then its grounding in Poplar's social life and its impact on the politics of the place are described. One sensibility is not given a chapter to itself however, and that is gender. This is because the four other frames of awareness mentioned can be discussed with reference to just one or two institutions of Poplar's civil society, which helpfully contributes towards the clarity of the arguments to be presented. Ideas about gender were so pervasive, however, that to treat them separately would involve a confusing degree of institutional dismemberment in Poplar's portrait. The gendered aspects of each ideology are therefore discussed within each chapter, and these scattered discussions of gender are brought together in the concluding chapter.

The division of Poplar's culture into four chapters is somewhat over-schematic then, since a fifth sensibility of gender remains outside the quartering. The thesis is also only a partial account of Poplar's culture. It focusses only on the five communal sensibilities which, after detailed research and various attempts to systematise the findings, appeared to be the most influential on the politics of the place. This means that awarenesses which seem to have had no political effect are ignored entirely, and other sensibilities with crucial implications for politics at the level of the nation state have also been neglected: the patriotism and royalism of Poplar is mentioned only in passing, for example. The thesis thus makes no claims to have retrieved the sum total of Poplar's culture, only those parts relevant to its local politics.

To Poplar then and its people, and the attempt to answer the questions of why Poplar Labour Party was so radical and why it won so much local support.

CHAPTER II

'OURS IS A CLASS MOVEMENT SIMPLY BECAUSE
 ONLY OUR CLASS REMAINS IN POPLAR':
 THE POLITICS OF CLASS IN 1920s POPLAR

Class is a communal sensibility. To echo Stedman Jones, it is a discursive reality, given causal power by people's collective comprehension of it.

This is not the way in which class is usually understood by historians and sociologists of course. Class is conventionally theorised not as a discursive but as a structural reality; people are defined as working-class by virtue of the theoretical abstraction of their relationship to the means of production. Class struggle is then defined as whatever working-class people do which has the effect of improving the terms of this relationship, regardless of how they themselves rationalise their action;¹ and such struggle is seen as political because its ultimate achievement would be the overthrow of the capitalist polity as well as of its economy. Thus industrial and political struggle are conceptualised as two sides of the same coin.

This theoretical merger of class and politics has deeply marked the historiography of working-class struggle in Britain. A key term of labour history, for example, is 'the labour movement', meaning both the industrial and the political organisations of the proletariat, a proletariat created and also united by grand processes of economic change, goaded into socialism alone by its experience of waged work in factories.² Bush, for example, in her study

1. see for example Savage's definition of class politics quoted in the previous chapter; M. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940 (Cambridge, 1987), p.17.

2. see for example G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate, The Common People 1746-1946, second edition (London, 1946); G. S. Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society, second edition

of politics in east London during the Great War, stresses the local activities of trade unionists in particular as central to the victories of the local Labour Parties in the 1919 local elections;³ and of course, as the first chapter noted, this fusion of class, waged labour and politics informed much of the early locality-studies, including those which discuss Poplar in the 1920s.⁴

Underlying these orthodox accounts of 'the' labour movement, of the unity of trade unions and Labour Parties on the basis of the class position of their members, are the class-theoreticism and structuralism which have been rejected for their exclusive interest in class, their denial of human agency and their neglect of politicisation processes. The Geertzian concept of culture was preferred, with its recognition that people think and act in ways shaped by their own diverse understandings of the world-- by their communal sensibilities -- rather than by their relationship to the means of production. This chapter is therefore concerned to fragment the notion of a united 'labour movement' by recovering the precise and various interpretations of class politics which existed both within and without Poplar's docks, factories and workshops; it is an analysis not of structures but of meanings.

The orthodox unity of class and politics is of more than theoretical interest however, for the same ideas guided the formation of the Labour Party itself. In its 1918 constitution, the Party institutionalised working-class politics in Britain at the national level through an alliance of the major organisations of the workers -- the trade unions -- and the coalition of socialist groups in the Labour Representation Committee. The basis of this

(Harmondsworth, 1984), pp.337-49; H. Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, fourth edition (London, 1987).

3. J. Bush, Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-1919, (London, 1984)

4. The united efforts of Poplar Labour Party and local trade unions in the 1920s are discussed in S.S. Duncan, M. Goodwin and S. Halford, 'Policy Variations in Local States: Uneven Development and Local Social Relations', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 12 (1988), 107-28 (p.118).

coalition was, according to the Party's historian, 'an acutely developed working-class consciousness' shared by all workers and contributing in part to the dominance on the Labour Party's national executive of the trade unions.⁵ Thus historians see trade unions, local trades councils and the various levels of the Labour Party as the battalions which organise the massed ranks of the proletarian army for institutional as well as for theoretical reasons.

In light of the organisational importance of trade unions to the Labour Party, this chapter on Poplar's politics of class opens by describing the trade unions in Poplar. It compares their politics to those of Poplar Labour Party, asking whether the politics of the former encouraged the radicalism of the latter. Is it in fact possible to speak of labour movement in Poplar united by a communal sensibility of class? The chapter then goes on to look at labour organisation outside the trade unions and at the actions of unorganised labour in an exploration of the various connections between the Party and industrial struggle in the area. The conclusion is that the politics of Poplar's workplaces were rather different from those of its Labour Party. After assessing the importance of waged labour to Poplar people and through an examination of the nuances of Poplar Labour Party's 'communal sensibility' of class, the chapter finally argues that it was not trade unions but local left-wing political groupings outside the Labour Party which influenced Poplar's radicalism the most.

Workplace politics

In the context of the present study's interest in Poplar's local politics, attention will be focussed on industrial struggle within Poplar's boundaries, for, as the previous chapter described, two out of three workers in Poplar also lived in the borough; and trade union branches were usually

5. R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24 (London, 1974), p.xiv.

based on residence rather than place of work.⁶ The central question this section asks is, were the struggles in Poplar's workplaces during the 1920s motivated by the same politics of class as inspired Poplar Labour Party?

The events of the General Strike in 1926 suggest that they may have been. The General Strike was the climax of a long-simmering conflict over the best means to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of the British coal industry. In April 1926, the mine-owners issued an ultimatum: unless miners accepted a 13 per cent wage cut and worked an extra hour a day, a lock-out would begin at midnight on 30 April. At a Special Meeting of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) on 1 May, every union in the country but one voted for a general strike in support of the miners, many arguing that the flood of wage cuts already accepted by labour had finally to be stemmed by united action. On 4 May the Strike began, and contemporary commentators were unanimous that its strength lay in its local organisation.⁷ Following a TUC directive, local trades councils, which co-ordinated all the trade unions in a locality, also co-ordinated the Strike locally, and their efficiency in comparison to the initial chaos at the TUC headquarters in Eccleston Square was an important element in the Strike's success. For successful it was; at its peak, just before the TUC called it off on 12 May in the belief that a settlement had been reached, about two million workers aside from the miners were on strike.⁸

Poplar had its full share of strikers. On 13 May, the TUC learnt of Poplar's reluctance to end the Strike:

The workers of POPLAR remain SOLID. Meetings

6. G.D.H. Cole, Organised Labour: An Introduction to Trade Unionism (London, 1924), p.59.

7. R.P. Arnot, The General Strike. May 1926: Its Origins and History, (London, 1926); E. Burns, The General Strike. May 1926: Trades Councils in Action, (London, 1926); R.W. Postgate, E. Wilkinson and J.F. Horrabin, A Workers' History of the Great Strike, (London, 1927).

8. for a history of the General Strike, see M. Morris, The General Strike, (Harmondsworth, 1976).

evinced the greatest Enthusiasm. No breakaways.
 Stoppage DEVELOPING. Go on and WIN.⁹

The source of this aggressive demand was the Trades Council (of Action) in Poplar, and there was also a committee consisting of delegates from twenty-three unions which organised the striking transport workers in the borough.¹⁰ The docks were at a complete standstill, heavily picketed, and virtually empty; of the 4,300 men the Port of London Authority estimated it would normally have employed each day, only a dozen or so were at work.¹¹ Support for the Strike extended beyond workplaces; here is an account of the fate of vehicles driving through Poplar without a trade union permit:

That afternoon, armed with my union card, I took a motor-bicycle trip along the East India Dock Road. The street swarmed with striking dockers. I have seen mass pickets enough; but this was a mass turnout of the local population. Along came a solitary lorry. It was brought to a standstill by a human barrier, scores upon scores deep, which lapped over the whole roadway. Out the driver was hauled and then one, two, three -- strong arms and shoulders went to work, the lorry swayed and swayed and with a crash went over on its side. The street was littered with offending vehicles to which like justice had been meted out.¹²

The local Labour Party was actively involved in the Strike. George Lansbury issued a cyclo-styled news-sheet, reminding Poplar workers of the vulnerability of their class to capitalist demands; 'the miners are in the front line, and were they to go down, we would all soon follow'.¹³ Five Poplar councillors were on the transport workers' strike committee: Dave Adams, Bert Baker, Richard Bond, Pete Hubbart and Joe Russell,¹⁴ and local people

9. Trades Union Congress Library, General Strike Archive (hereafter GSA), box 2, letter from Poplar Trades Council (of Action), 13.5.1926.

10. GSA, box 2, letter from the Strike Organisation Committee, Poplar, 11.5.1926.

11. Port of London Authority Library, General Strike file A 3/9132, Daily Reports From the Dock Warehouse Manager.

12. A. Hutt, The Post-War History of the British Working Class 1918-37 (London, 1937), p.136.

13. GSA, box 2, Bow and Bromley Strike Bulletin, 6.5.1926.

14. East London Advertiser, 22.5.1926.

waited outside the Town Hall for news during the Strike.¹⁵ In organisational terms then, Poplar's Labour Party and trade unions co-operated during the General Strike.

This co-operation was unsurprising given the Party's rhetoric of class; like modern labour historians, it believed in unity based upon a structural class position. 'COMRADES!' exclaimed George Lansbury, 'in this struggle we are all one, women, men, boys and girls; there is and will be no division; we all stand as one'.¹⁶ The Party had seen itself as class-based long before the heady days of May 1926. Lansbury described Poplarism as 'a class movement',¹⁷ and the Labour Party castigated capitalists with businesses in Poplar:

Those rich, wealthy plutocrats whose only interest in you [the Poplar voter] is to draw rent, profit and interest out of the Borough, who will not even sacrifice time to serve you as guardians or councillors, who in actual fact would not be found dead in Poplar except for the purposes of making money.¹⁸

In contrast, argued Lansbury (a little inaccurately), the efforts of the local Labour Party were 'on behalf of poor people by poor people. Not one of us can claim more than an elementary school education'.¹⁹ 'Class' meant 'workers' to Poplar Labour Party, in the same way as the national Labour Party equated class with waged workers;²⁰ 'we are the organisation of the workers of all classes, against landlords and capitalists',²¹ it exclaimed. (Like many marxist social scientists, the Party seems to have been uncertain how to define the middle class, and during

15. East London Advertiser, 22.5.1926.

16. GSA, box 2, Bow and Bromley Strike Bulletin, 6.5.1926.

17. G. Lansbury in C.W. Key, Red Poplar: Six Years of Socialist Rule, (London, 1925), p.3.

18. Tower Hamlets Local History Library (hereafter THLHL), Poplar Labour Party 1922 council election handbill.

19. Key, Red Poplar, p.4.

20. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, pp.xiv-xv.

21. London School of Economics and Political Science, George Lansbury papers (hereafter GLP), vol 30b, Poplar Labour Party undated local election handbill.

the General Strike local shopkeepers were seen as the workers' allies.)²²

Is this portrait of a united labour movement in Poplar built on a belief in class solidarity true? It has been painted almost wholly from the viewpoint of the Party; for an adequate answer, the action of workers must be interpreted and their own voices listened to. Table 4 on the next page begins that task by listing the strikes in Poplar's workplaces between 1919 and 1929, and thus gives some idea of the character of industrial struggle in the borough aside from the titanic upheaval of May 1926.

What the table reveals most clearly is how typical Poplar's workers were, in the kinds of struggle they undertook, of workers in the country at large.²³ Massive unrest erupted in 1919 and the first months of 1920; workers were making so many demands on employers and the government that at one point the government feared revolution. War had radicalised workers by increasing their organisation, heightening their expectation of change and by creating the hated figure of the profiteer. Thus when peace came, wage demands escalated and, because of the continued involvement of the government in industry, industrial struggle took on political overtones, especially in the engineering workshops with their (often communist) shop stewards' committees.²⁴ By the summer of 1920 however, the position was very different. The vulnerability of an unmodernised industrial base in the face of growing world competition was beginning to tell,

22. GSA, box 2, Bow and Bromley Strike Bulletin, 6.5.1926. The position of shopkeepers remained a matter dispute in Poplar Labour Party; John Scurr saw them as class enemies while Charlie Sumner knew them simply as owners of local cornershops; East London Advertiser, 5.3.1921.

23. for summaries of the labour movement in the 1920s, see H.A. Clegg, A History of British Trade Unions since 1889: Volume II, 1911-33, (Oxford, 1985); J. Hinton, Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974 (Brighton, 1983); Hutt, The Post-War History of the British Working Class.

24. J. Hinton, The First Shop Stewards Movement, (London, 1973); W. Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921: The Origins of British Communism, (London, 1969).

TABLE 4
STRIKES IN POPLAR 1919-29

	for wages increase	against wages cut	demarc- ation dispute	for re- instate- ment of worker	in support of another strike	other	total
1919							
2	0	1	0	0	1	4	
1920							
2	0	0	0	0	1	3	
1921							
0	4	1	0	0	0	5	
1922							
2	2	0	0	1	0	5	
1923							
0	6	1	1	1	1	10	
1924							
10	0	0	2	0	0	12	
1925							
3	1	0	3	0	1	8	
1926							
0	0	1	2	1	0	4	
1927							
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
1928							
0	0	0	1	0	3	4	
1929							
0	0	0	0	0	3	3	

Source: PRO, LAB34/19-47, Strike Registers. For London strikes, the name of the firm concerned was not always recorded and it was not therefore possible to verify the strike's location. This table may therefore underestimate the number of strikes in Poplar.

and Britain entered an economic slump. Unemployment rose, and, as the previous chapter noted, Poplar was especially affected because of its reliance on the docks. The responses of industry in London to this depression were various and took different forms in different places. Investment in new and modern industries tended to locate in outer London;²⁵ elsewhere, the most common strategy of employers to increase competitiveness and productivity was to demand wage cuts, to increase output by shifting to piece-rate methods of payment, or to mechanise the work process, and chapter I explored the impact of this restructuring in Poplar in its discussion of unemployment. Another consequence of restructuring was the many strikes in protest at wage reductions. By 1924 though, trade had revived and workers tried to make up lost ground, striking for wage rises and for the reinstatement of colleagues felt to have been wrongly dismissed; this radicalism culminated in the General Strike in 1926. After the Strike and the subsequent defeat of the miners, the confidence of labour declined and the number of strikes decreased, a tendency enhanced by the continuing danger of unemployment. The close of the 1920s was an era of stable wages, collective bargaining, conciliation and of talks between Sir Alfred Mond, the chair of Imperial Chemical Industries, and Ben Turner, chair of the TUC, aimed at achieving industrial harmony. Table 4 shows that Poplar's strikes followed this broad national pattern.

But what did this pattern mean in Poplar? Does it reflect the waxing and waning of struggle understood in class terms by its participants? Cronin has insisted on the need for careful interpretation of strikes:

The industrial working-class speaks its mind negatively, forced to communicate its fears, wants, grievances, hopes and aspirations through a weak and poorly developed language of industrial resistance. Deciphering its messages requires a systematic effort of translation.²⁶

25. D.H. Smith, Industries of Greater London, (London, 1933).

26. J.E. Cronin, Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain (London, 1979), p.8.

The most commonly found and articulate voice of workers' fears and wants are the trade unions, and listening to them may help this translation. The next section begins to explore the meaning of industrial struggle in Poplar, including the strikes in Table 4, using the evidence offered by local trade unions.²⁷

Trade unions and Poplar Labour Party

There were occasions during the 1920s when trade unions and Poplar Labour Party co-operated with each other; the best example of this is the General Strike of 1926 described above. This section explores the actions of local trade unions more generally and, in the light of its findings, argues that, despite the events of 1926, they were not the source of Poplar Labour Party's socialism. The politics of Poplar's trade unions were rather different from those of the local Labour Party.

With the major exception of the miners,²⁸ trade unions were not socialist organisations in the 1920s. Cronin has summarised their character; 'labour in Britain has, for most of its organised existence, been committed to political and industrial moderation and to the pursuit of its ends through peaceful electoral advance or orderly

27. The following discussion of trade unions in Poplar suffers from a lack of local archives. I was unable to trace the whereabouts of any trade union branch meeting minutes, for example; nor could I find the records of Poplar's trades council. The method has therefore been to find references to Poplar branches in the journals of national unions, and to supplement these with information derived from non-trade union sources.

28. This makes theorising from the experience of miners alone hazardous, exaggerating the radicalism of British workers. Locality-study writers like Cooke and Rees often do look only at mining localities however, and this may explain their enthusiasm for class analyses. For a discussion of the difficulties involved, see H. Southall, 'Towards a Geography of Unionization: The Spatial Organisation and Distribution of Early British Trade Unions', Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, forthcoming 1988.

collective bargaining'.²⁹ Did trade unions in Poplar share this conservatism? Or did they imbue Poplar's strikes with the anger of class consciousness, with the same spirit of socialist radicalism as infused Poplar Labour Party?

An important clue to the politics of Poplar's trade unions is the sort of politics they encouraged their members to support. Trade unions, although never the sole source of political propaganda in a locality, played a part in the political education of workers. Joining a craft union often involved an explanation from older members as to why uniting to resist the demands of employers was necessary,³⁰ and branches might invite political speakers to their meetings; Poplar no.2 branch of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) listened to Evelyn Sharp discuss the Irish situation in 1921 and heard Poplar councillors explain their defiance of the rating law in the same year, and Bow no.2 branch of the same union heard the views of the Land Nationalisation Society in 1920.³¹ Union journals discussed politics, urging their readers to vote Labour in elections and analysing 'the class war'.³² Clearly Poplar's trade unions did support the Labour Party. Bush argues that it was this propaganda by trade unions, given credibility by the unions' constant and successful attempts to improve working conditions and wages during the First World War, which ensured the Labour Party's victory in east London's local elections in 1919.³³ However, these were national unions advocating support for the national

29. J.E. Cronin, 'Coping with Labour, 1918-26', in Social Conflict and the Political Order in Modern Britain, edited by J. E. Cronin and J. Schneer, (London, 1982), pp.113-45 (p.113).

30. J. Dash, Good Morning Brothers, (London, 1969); G. Haw, From Workhouse to Westminster: The Life Story of Will Crooks M.P. (London, 1911).

31. National Union of Railwaymen, Railway Review, 1.4.1921, p.12, 26.8.1921, p.12 and 22.10.1920, p.7.

32. Transport and General Workers' Union, Record, July 1922, p.13.

33. Bush, Behind the Lines.

Labour Party, not Poplar Labour Party; and the two were rather different things.

Although Poplar's politics found support among the more radical sections of the Labour Party, they were not greeted with whole-hearted enthusiasm by Labour Party leaders. Ramsay MacDonald rejected Poplarism:

That workmen should not tolerate without a struggle to remedy their conditions, which are not only hard but unjust, is good, but in their struggles to secure their ends they are tempted to forget that they are all interdependent members of a social unity, and that consequently they only injure themselves by punishing those against whom they have a grievance to such an extent that they injure the Society to which they belong ... It cannot be over-emphasised that public doles, Poplarism, strikes for increased wages, limitation of output, not only are not Socialism, but may mislead the spirit and policy of the movement.³⁴

The national Labour Party's Advisory Committee on Local Government also condemned Poplarism, despite the pleas of Poplar's Susan Lawrence.³⁵ Poplarism was rejected by the London Labour Party too. Its secretary, Herbert Morrison, was a renowned anti-Communist, so it is hardly surprisingly that he disliked Poplar's radicalism,³⁶ and at the London Labour Party's 1921 annual conference he outlined his reasons. They were four. He argued firstly that if Labour broke the law when it was in office, it justified Conservatives doing the same when Labour were in power; secondly, Labour could only lose votes by causing chaos in local government; thirdly, actions like Poplar's would only increase the control of central government over local; and

34. J.R. MacDonald, Socialism: Critical and Constructive, second edition (London, 1924), pp.vi-vii.

35. Labour Party Library, Labour Party Advisory Committee on Local Government, minutes of meetings, 17.3.1921.

36. Labour Party Library, Council of Action archive, letters from F. Bramley, 30.12.1920 and from H. Morrison, 18.1.1921. See also B. Donoghue and G.W. Jones, Herbert Morrison (London, 1973), and G.W. Jones, 'Herbert Morrison and Poplarism', Public Law, 18 (1973), 11-31.

finally, people should vote for such a policy and that neither of Poplar's two M.P.s were Labour.³⁷

Poplar returned this hostility. Lansbury vigorously defended Poplarism in the Labour Monthly, pointing out that Labour had massive majorities on Poplar's local authorities and thus their policies did not lose votes. He then moved from defence to attack and argued that Labour critics of Poplarism were evading a central issue.

Sooner or later the Labour Party must face all the implications of administrative responsibility. The workers must be given tangible proof that Labour administration means something different from Capitalist administration, and in a nutshell this means diverting wealth from the wealthy ratepayers to the poor.³⁸

Poplar council even refused to take the London Labour Party's news-sheet in Poplar libraries.³⁹

Thus the support of Poplar's trade unions for the national Labour Party does not necessarily mean they approved of Poplar Labour Party's tactics, and it is in fact possible to detect a political divergence between local trade unions and Poplar Labour Party. This will now be explored.

The politics of Poplar's trade unions begin to emerge when the strategies they adopted to win more members are scrutinised. It is difficult to discover the extent of trade union membership in Poplar in the 1920s. In 1917, under wartime conditions favourable to trade union organisation, the locality had 16,337 union members in thirty five trade unions, which was approximately 30 per cent of the working population.⁴⁰ However, with the major exception of the docks, Gillespie has argued that in the the 1920s trade unionism in east London was quite

37. LLPA, Report of the Executive Committee for 1920-21, pp.18-19.

38. G. Lansbury, 'Poplar and the Labour Party: A Defence of Poplarism', Labour Monthly, 2 (1922), 383-391 (p.388).

39. THLHL, PMBC, Libraries Committee, minutes of meetings, 7.6.1922.

40. Gazetteer of Trade Union Branches, Trades Councils, etc., in the United Kingdom, 3 vols (London, 1918), I, pp.224-26.

limited.⁴¹ This seems to have been true in Poplar. Many Poplar employers were hostile to trade unions,⁴² and, apart from the docks and possibly the railways (Poplar no.1 branch of the NUR had over a thousand members in 1928),⁴³ the industries employing many Poplar workers were notorious for their bad organisation. In 1921, when the Census categorised about 7,000 Poplar men as metalworkers, Poplar's four branches of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) had a mere 1,226 members.⁴⁴ Tailoring unions had few East End members.⁴⁵ Domestic servants were almost entirely non-unionised.⁴⁶ And union membership among unskilled labourers and packers varied wildly. This low level of trade union membership was caused by many factors, including unemployment, casual labour, homeworking,⁴⁷ the

41. J.A. Gillespie, 'Economic and Political Change in the East End of London During the 1920s' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1984).

42. interview with Mr. Maillard by the author, 16.6.1987; interview with Mr. Emms by the Island History Trust (hereafter IHT), no date.

43. Railway Review, 10.2.1928, p.14.

44. Amalgamated Engineering Union, Monthly Journal, July 1920, Trade Portion. Not all of the 7,000 would have been eligible for membership of the AEU because it generally recruited skilled workers only in the early 1920s; J.B. Jefferys, The Story of the Engineers (London, 1945).

45. S.P. Dobbs, The Clothing Workers of Great Britain (London, 1928), p.79.

46. B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions (London, 1920?), p.112; C.V. Butler, Domestic Service (London, 1916).

47. The isolated nature of homeworking made organisation of homeworkers difficult, and homeworkers themselves were often reluctant to join a union for fear of losing the work; V. de Vesselitsky, The Homemaker and Her Outlook: A Descriptive Study of Tailoresses and Boxmakers (London, 1916). The extent of home-working in Poplar is difficult to establish. Poplar's Medical Officer of Health between 1919 and 1929 registered an average of only six hundred homeworkers each year; PMBC, Annual Report on the Sanitary Condition and Vital Statistics of the Metropolitan Borough of Poplar, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29). Yet an interviewee who lived in Bow during the 1920s remembers every woman in her street taking in some kind of homework and this suggests that the official figures underestimate the actual total; interview with Mrs Sumner by the author, 2.6.1987.

reluctance of men to recruit women into trade unions, and the reluctance of women to join trade unions;⁴⁸ above all, the poverty of the area meant union subscriptions were hard to pay. Their lack of members made recruitment a vital concern of local unions,⁴⁹ and this led to competition between unions for members.

Unions in Poplar clashed over which workers should belong to which union because different unions were organised on different principles. Some claimed members on the basis of industry, some on the basis of employer and some on the basis of craft, and the result was undignified squabbles over who was entitled to who.⁵⁰ On the Thames, the Watermen, Lightermen, Tugmen and Bargemen's Union tried to prevent Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) members from working on the river.⁵¹ In the docks, the stevedores' union's membership grew from 6,000 to 17,000 in 1923 as a result of its recruitment of men striking against the TGWU's acceptance of a weekly wage cut of two shillings;⁵² the Disputes Committee of the TUC decreed this to be poaching and ordered the stevedores to return its new members to the TGWU.⁵³ In 1927 the National Association of Local Government Officers tried to organise the fourth grade clerks of the Port of London Authority and was castigated by the TGWU for being 'servile and patronised ... a predatory body' for its pains.⁵⁴ Demarcation

48. Drake, Women in Trade Unions, pp.198-202. Men at Morton's and Machonochie's, two large food factories on the Isle of Dogs, refused to recruit women into the Transport and General Workers' Union; Record, October 1925, p.77. The masculinity of trade unionism is discussed further in the next sub-section.

49. The London District Committee of the AEU, whose chair was a member of the Millwall branch, organised a recruitment campaign in 1923, for example; Monthly Journal, July 1923, p.64.

50. Cole, Organised Labour, p.24.

51. Record, July 1927, p.383.

52. PRO, FS12/135, Yearly Returns of the National Amalgamated Stevedores' and Dockers' Union to the Registrar of Friendly Societies, 1922 and 1923.

53. Record, December 1923, p.3.

54. Record, May 1927, p.316.

disputes between unions were also common. The Boilermakers and Engineers fought over who should bolt up machine-finished lights, the Railwaymen and Lightermen clashed over whether railwaymen ought to remove barge covers if no lightermen were present,⁵⁵ shiprepairers struck in protest at the use of labourers on painting jobs, and ship joiners walked out to stop electricians doing joiners' tasks.⁵⁶ These disputes within the labour movement reflect the nature of the unions' politics; the sectionalism and rivalry over members of trade unions in Poplar does not suggest an excess of working-class solidarity or a great willingness to bury differences and further the revolution, and it was the bane of communist agitators in the district.⁵⁷ It is a definite hint that trade unions in the locality were not by and large suffused with the class consciousness so prominent in the rhetoric of Poplar Labour Party.

In fact there was a significant political gap between Poplar Labour Party and local trade unions. Relations between the council and unions in Poplar were often strained, with unions being marginalised from the political arena and disagreeing often with Poplar Labour Party's policies. Local NUR branches disliked the Party's extremism, for example; Poplar no.1 branch firmly disassociated itself from the criticism of its union's general secretary made by the Bow and Bromley Labour Party in 1924, Bow no.1 branch strongly disapproved of the 'Communist element' in the same party,⁵⁸ and the Poplar

55. Monthly Journal, June 1919, p.41; Railway Review, 22.6.1923, p.15.

56. PRO, LAB34/37 and LAB34/41.

57. H. Pollitt, Serving My Time: An Apprenticeship to Politics (London, 1940). The sectionalism in London's docks questions Hobsbawm's assertion that 'the basic direction of British waterside unionism was not local or sectional, but from the beginning regional or even national'; E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London, 1964), p.206. Also see J. Lovell, Stevedores and Dockers: A Study of Trade Unionism in the Port of London 1870-1914 (London, 1969).

58. Railway Review, 3.10.1924, p.13 and 3.3.1922, p.13.

no.1 branch condemned illegal methods of changing local government legislation.⁵⁹ The Millwall branch of the AEU refused to discuss politics at all at their meetings.⁶⁰ The political gulf between the local trade unions and Poplar Labour Party yawned most prominently in 1927. In that year the Borough Labour Party and its Trades Council were disaffiliated from the national Labour Party because of their refusal to implement its policy and expel their Communist members. None of Poplar's trade unions supported their local Party in its stand; they were all keen to establish new communist-free organisations.⁶¹ The local NUR branches quickly affiliated to the official bodies,⁶² and the district representative of the TGWU withheld transport workers' fees to Poplar Labour Party even before it was officially expelled.⁶³

The Labour Party could be antagonistic to local unions in return. Its minimum wage policy was established without consultation with trade unions, causing some resentment, and, later, barely-suppressed glee within the TGWU when the House of Lords declared the policy illegal.⁶⁴ The council later offended the engineers' union by continuing to pay unskilled men the 'four pounds a week minimum after the engineers' negotiated rate fell below that level, and the AEU was also grumpy at the inordinately long time it took Poplar council to recognise the Electricity Department's works committee.⁶⁵ Building workers on relief works went

59. LLPA, Final Agenda for the Annual Conference, 1927, p.9.

60. Monthly Journal, May 1920, p.78 and October 1920, p.83.

61. LLPA, Executive Committee documents 1920-28, Executive Committee agenda 1.12.1927, Report of the London District Organiser.

62. Railway Review, 9.12.1927, p.13, 20.1.1928, p.14 and 9.3.1928, p.12.

63. LLPA, Executive Committee, minutes of meetings, 7.7.1927.

64. Record, March 1926 p.179.

65. Monthly Journal, August 1922, p.38 and November 1925, p.36.

on strike in order to enforce a closed shop, but the council resisted, insisting it hired men on the basis of their skill, not their trade union membership.⁶⁶ Finally, in 1927 left-wingers in the Party tried to oust the moderate TGWU official who was their M.P.⁶⁷ It seems highly unlikely that local trade unions were the source of Poplar Labour Party's class politics, then.

Nonetheless, fifteen of Poplar's seventy Labour men and women who served as Guardians or councillors between 1919 and 1929 were either trade union branch secretaries or full-time union officials.⁶⁸ How can the mutual antagonism between Poplar Labour Party and local trade unions be accounted for given this prominence of trade unionists on Poplar council? This question will be answered by examining how specific trade unionists became politically active.

The body connecting a Labour Party to its local trade unions was the trades council. In the 1920s trades councils were meant to be industrial bodies which co-ordinated trade union activity within an area, and which left politics to the Labour Party. But many were politically active on their own account, including Poplar's; it was particularly influential in selecting the Labour candidates for elections.⁶⁹ As the councils' historian has noted, the sort of trade unionist likely to become involved in a politically-inclined trades council was one who saw politics and industry as connected and who wanted to use industrial strength to gain non-industrial ends; that is, politically active trade unionists tended to be left-wing. Through a process of self-selection by their members then, trades councils tended to be quite radical

66. THLHL, PMBC Works Committee, minutes of meetings, 23.3.1922 and 27.4.1922.

67. East London Advertiser, 12.11.1927.

68. This information comes from a wide range of sources, trade union journals and the biographical press cuttings collection at THLHL being the most useful.

69. G. Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar (London, 1975), p.89.

bodies.⁷⁰ This was certainly true in Poplar; in 1927 the secretary of the council was an ex-colleague of the communist Sylvia Pankhurst,⁷¹ and as has been noted, in the same year the national Labour Party expelled Poplar Trades Council for refusing to implement the Party's anti-Communist conference resolutions.

Trade unionists politically active in Poplar were usually left-wingers. Ed Cruse for example was an AEU Organising District Delegate and Bow and Bromley's London county councillor, and his politics were uncompromising; writing in overtly Marxist language during the terrible unemployment of the early 1920s, he argued that workers should unite in one big industrial union in order to achieve production for use rather than for profit, and demanded industrial and political action to end the capitalist system, a view hardly typical of the AEU.⁷² Dave Adams was a Labour councillor and Guardian in Poplar, and was a TGWU official; in 1920 he co-operated with the communist Workers' Socialist Federation in Poplar to persuade dockers not to load the 'Jolly George' with arms for Poland.⁷³ Although trades councils were a direct link between the workplace and the Labour Party then, the link was a distorted one, for trades councils tended to attract left-wingers. This explains the political disjuncture between the majority of trade unions in Poplar and their few political activists.

Trade unions do not appear to be the source of Poplar Labour Party's radicalism then; indeed, the evidence which survives suggests that they were actively opposed to the Party's communist leanings. To speak of 'the' labour movement in Poplar is obviously inaccurate. There were divisions within it, with the local Labour Party taking its

70. A. Clinton, The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain 1900-40, (Manchester, 1977), p.53.

71. THLHL, Poplar Workers' Electoral Committee 1928 Guardian election handbill.

72. Monthly Journal, January 1921, p.66.

73. East End News, 22.5.1942. The 'Jolly George' incident is discussed in more detail below.

class analysis to a left-wing extreme while trade unions remained more moderate. It thus seems more accurate to speak of a diversity of class politics in Poplar rather than of one 'communal sensibility' of class.

The class politics of Poplar's other labour organisations

Having established that trade unions were opposed to the communist leanings of Poplar Labour Party, the question of whether they accurately reflect local workers' politics must arise; for Poplar workers voted for the Party with enthusiasm, as Table 2 demonstrated. And of course trade unions are not the sum total of industrial struggle; to judge workers' sensibilities on the basis of trade union utterances alone may be to distort the meanings workers attached to workplace struggle. Thus a major theme of inter-war labour history is the unofficial, rank-and-file movements, usually led by Communists, which opposed the moderate national leadership of trade unions. Seen in this context, Poplar's low level of union membership might represent disgust at the conservatism of trade unions and, to investigate this possibility, the unofficial organisations among Poplar's workers will now be examined.

Unofficial movements in fact appear to have been very weak in Poplar, and had no influence on either its workers or its Labour Party. The borough had relatively few strikes during the overtly political and near-revolutionary upheavals of 1919 and early 1920 compared to localities like Sheffield and Clydeside which, like Poplar, had heavy concentrations of engineering and shipbuilding industry.⁷⁴ Poplar railwaymen rejected Communist-led organisations,⁷⁵ the Communist Party had no cells in Poplar factories

74. The annual total of strikes in the country as a whole in the decade 1919 to 1929 peaks massively in the years 1919 and 1920, while in Poplar those years experienced relatively few strikes; Ministry of Labour, Gazette, 38 (1930), p.162, and PRO, LAB34/19-47, Strike Registers, 1919-29.

75. Railway Review, 24.8.1923.

(although it did elsewhere in east London),⁷⁶ and appeals for revolutionary strike action emanating from the branches of the Communist Minority Movement for port workers in Poplar High Street were met with a resounding silence in Poplar's docks.⁷⁷ Local trade unions do then seem to be representative of local workers; neither unions nor workers were especially radical.

There were occasional exceptions to this portrait of Poplar workers as moderates in industrial struggle however. In particular, unofficial strikes organised by Communists in the locality brought workers out in response to class appeals. The two of the largest of these strikes will now be examined, yet it will be suggested that even these were prompted by other motivations besides class.

The first was the strike in February 1919 by ship-repairers for a fifteen shilling a week pay rise, organised by the River Thames Shop Stewards Movement and for which the London District Committee of the AEU was expelled from its union.⁷⁸ A leading figure in this agitation was the Communist Harry Pollitt, a member of the Boilermakers' Society. The revolutionary goals he projected from strike action can be seen in his description of the Communist Party as 'a party of the working class, which strives to build up the daily fight of the workers, seeking through that struggle to strengthen the working class fight, until by revolutionary action we can destroy the whole apparatus

76. Communist Papers: Documents Selected from those Obtained on the Arrest of the Communist Leaders on the 14th and 21st of October, 1925, cmd.2682, (Parliamentary Papers [hereafter PP] 1926, vol XXIII), p.71.

77. F. Thompson, Maintenance for Dockers -- NOW, not in 1940, and a National Dock Programme (London, 1928) and The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and International Seamen's Clubs (Hamburg, 1930?). For a history of the Minority Movement, see R. Martin, Communism and the British Trade Unions 1924-33: A Study of the National Minority Movement (Oxford, 1969).

78. Workers' Dreadnought, 1.2.1919, 22.2 1919.

of the capitalist State and end the domination and exploitation that it represents.⁷⁹

However, class was not the only grounds on which Pollitt appealed to Poplar shiprepairers to strike; he also told them 'if you are men' they would resist the bosses and demand more wages.⁸⁰ This workplace rebellion may have been based in part on class awareness then, but issues of gender were deeply implicated as well. For, from the evidence of the rhetoric used by all labour leaders when trying to incite men to resistance, threats to men's masculinity were crucial catalysts of industrial action. To stand up and engage in a struggle for authority and control involved conceptions of manhood as much as anything else. Will Thorne, for example, the founder of the giant National Union of General and Municipal Workers, described his creation as having 'put backbone into the men throughout the country',⁸¹ and went on to define the early union campaigners in terms of their masculinisation of the non-unionised: 'Tillett, Burns, Tom Mann and others used to preach the gospel of manliness at the dock gates' (p.83). To join a union as a way of fighting the employers was a manly thing to do, and the labour movement's concept of brotherhood was very close to the specifically male bonding described by Harry Gosling among the watermen:

One of their most pronounced traits is perhaps their inherent trust in each other, though they are hardly conscious of it and would certainly not admit it ... The absolute dependence of one man upon another creates a bond between them which is almost as strong as a blood tie ... the calls upon each other for help produce this.⁸²

The rhetoric of maleness reached a peak during strikes. Will Thorne once confronted a blackleg and 'appealed to his manhood but without success' for the man continued to break the strike;⁸³ the journal of the TGWU repeatedly equated

79. Pollitt in H. Pollitt and F. Brockway, Which Way for the Workers? (London, 1932), p.3.

80. Workers' Dreadnought, 1.2.1919 (my emphasis).

81. W. Thorne, My Life's Battles (London, 1926), p.83.

82. H. Gosling, Up and down Stream, (London, 1927), p.28.

83. Thorne, My Life's Battles, p.22.

striking with masculinity, accusing volunteer workers during the General Strike of losing their manhood;⁸⁴ railwayworkers were told by the General Secretary of the NUR that their 1919 strike was 'a test of their manhood'.⁸⁵ To resist subordination was to be a real man, proud, strong and fighting to maintain control of the workplace.

The second unofficial strike organised by communists in Poplar to be looked at here is that of the dockers in July 1923. Once again, the language of class was prominent in the thinking of the strike leaders. Here is one of them recounting the sins of the TGWU and its general secretary Ernest Bevin:

The suppression of all local activities in defence of conditions ... the compact for peace at any price that exists between Bevin and the shipowners ... the victimisation of militants with the consent of the union ... a reliance on conciliation machinery which only functions when the militant elements temporarily break through the network of safeguards so carefully prepared for the protection of port employers.⁸⁶

What was really needed, he continued, was 'a class-conscious trade union leadership, unfettered by implications and private understandings with employers'.⁸⁷ This conviction led to him persuading dockers in London and elsewhere to defy the class-collaborationist TGWU in 1923 and strike for more money.

As in the shiprepairers' strike, however, it is possible to detect motivations other than class among the striking dockers in Poplar. This was the strike from which the stevedores' union gained so many new members, and the character of that union does not suggest that dockers joined it for its militancy; the stevedores had no political fund, and were affiliated to neither the TUC nor

84. Transport and General Workers' Union, Record, May-July 1926, p.239.

85. Railway Review, 12.12.1919, p.1.

86. Thompson, Maintenance for Dockers, p.2. As early as 1921, Thompson stood in the TGWU's elections for its general secretary to protest about the moderacy and autocracy of the union; Record, December 1921, p.8.

87. Thompson, Maintenance for Dockers, p.7.

to the even more moderate General Federation of Trade Unions.⁸⁸ They were however extremely democratic,⁸⁹ and this suggests that the strike was as much against the size of the TGWU, its insensitive bureaucracy and its control by outsiders, as it was about union policy; as the final chapter argues at greater length, Poplar people were suspicious of outsiders and disliked being dominated by them.

Thus far, Poplar's trade unions and its unofficial labour movement have been studied, and doubts raised as to the extent and the efficacy of class consciousness among Poplar workers. Poplar's labour force seems to have been galvanised into action only rarely by class-based appeals, and on those few occasions, other motivations seem to have been crucial in reinforcing their class consciousness. There is thus very little evidence of a communal sensibility of class among Poplar workers. Some certainly did understand their strikes and other workplace struggles in class terms; Poplar Labour Party and some trade unionists and rank-and-file activists questioned the validity of capitalism itself, asking 'shall we fight or not for the rights of humanity, for the right of every human creature to satisfy the mere physical needs of life, whether we place life above property'.⁹⁰ But most of Poplar's workers and trade unionists appear not to have found such issues relevant to their waged work. To speak of a united labour movement in Poplar, sharing a common understanding of class, is clearly inaccurate; neither in terms of organisational links nor in terms of a common understanding of class can Poplar's labour organisations be seen as a united whole.

But perhaps a more radical understanding of class existed among Poplar workers unexpressed in their organisations. The next section explores that possibility.

88. PRO, FS12/135.

89. S. Hill, The Dockers: Class and Tradition in London, (London, 1976), p.130.

90. THLHL, Poplar Labour Party 1925 Guardian election handbill.

Unorganised resistance in Poplar's workplaces

The historian Richard Price has studied the work practices of English labour in some detail and has discovered a vigorous tradition of 'resistance to subordination at the workplace' which he interprets as a form of class struggle.⁹¹ He suggests this tradition can be divided into four categories. The first form of resistance catalogued by him is informal organisation, by which he means rank and file organisation outside trade unions. This has already been discussed and its weakness in Poplar noted.

The second is restrictive practices, and these were notoriously common in London's docks. Stevedores always began work fifteen minutes after they officially should have done, gangers habitually claimed half-an-hour's stoppage for a twenty minute shower of rain, and dockers on piece rates never worked harder than was needed to earn one-and-a-third of the time rate because if they did, the piece rate would be reduced.⁹² The sixteen shillings minimum daily wage for dockers recommended by the Transport Workers' Court of Enquiry in 1920 was based on the hope that output would increase in proportion to the pay increase, for dockers were infamous for working only as hard and as long as they wanted.⁹³ And dockworkers were not alone in this instrumental attitude towards work. An East End woman making boxes at home was interviewed in 1916 and showed the same calculation of maximum return; she said, 'but what's the use of earning more ... when you 'as to lie awake fretting about its getting done on time?'⁹⁴

91. R. Price, 'Rethinking Labour History: The Importance of Work', in Social Conflict and the Political Order in Modern Britain, edited by Cronin and Schneer, pp.179-214 (p.192).

92. R.B. Oram, The Dockers' Tragedy (London, 1970), p.53 and pp.109-110.

93. Transport Workers' Court of Inquiry: Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Inquiry, cmd.936 (PP 1920, vol XXIV); A. Shadwell, The Problem of Dock Labour (London, 1920).

94. Vessilitsky, The Homeworker, p.7.

The third mode of resistance described by Price is a struggle for the control of overtime. Occasional instances of this can be found in Poplar. In 1921 for example the London District Committee of the AEU, whose chair was a member of the Millwall branch of the union, decided to limit shiprepairers' hours to forty five a week so that as many engineers as possible could find work at a time of bad unemployment,⁹⁵ and Poplar firms were visited by the AEU's Organising District Delegate to enforce this ban.⁹⁶

Price's fourth type of resistance is the demand for job security. This was a major concern of dockers' unions and social reformers throughout the decade, and has been explored exhaustively by Phillips and Whiteside.⁹⁷ However, as these authors note, there was little support among dockers themselves for proposals to decasualise their work; they enjoyed the freedom to work when they wanted to.

The common element Price detects among these four forms of rebellion is their class-based nature. He states that 'it is as resistance to capitalist domination of the labour process that these traditions must be viewed' (p.197) and he therefore sees them as part of the class struggle (p.205). Even if this interpretation of these rebellious traditions were acceptable, their weakness in Poplar (apart from restrictive practices) does not suggest a class conscious workforce locally; but Price's argument is rooted in the structuralist theory described in the opening of this chapter wherein workplace struggles are automatically defined as class-based. This thesis argues in contrast that it is the workers' interpretations of their actions which have causal power, and Price offers no evidence that workers themselves saw their actions in terms of the class struggle. How then can these practices be more accurately interpreted?

95. Monthly Journal, May 1921, p.46.

96. Monthly Journal, August 1921, p.37.

97. G. Phillips and N. Whiteside, Casual Labour: The Unemployment Question in the Port Transport Industry 1880-1970 (Oxford, 1985).

The next section suggests that the reasons for Poplar workers' behaviour, for their apathy over organisations trying to improve their conditions of labour and for their restrictive practices, lies in the lack of importance they attached to waged labour.

The unimportance of waged labour in Poplar

There have already been hints in the discussion of unorganised resistance in workplaces above that workers in Poplar had an instrumental attitude towards their paid labour, using it on their own terms through restrictive practices and undisciplined behaviour, for example. The reluctance among Poplar's workers to join a union, and the dockers' refusal to fight for the registration which would tie them down to a specific job, may also bespeak an independence from the arena of paid labour. Certainly contemporary commentators were very worried that unemployment and casual labour -- both extensive in Poplar --⁹⁸ destroyed the desire to work and produced 'loafers'.⁹⁹ An assessment of just how important the workplace and its wage relations and labour processes were to Poplar's workers therefore seems appropriate, and this section argues that the most important priorities of Poplar

98. The extent of casual labour in Poplar is difficult to assess. Gillespie argues that it was extensive in the early 1920s but was less by the end of the decade; Gillespie, 'Political and Economic Change in the East End'. In the week of the two per cent sample survey of working-class households undertaken by the New Survey in 1929, only 2.6 per cent of Poplar's workers described themselves as casually employed; British Library of Political and Economic Science, New Survey of London Life and Labour, household card survey, boxes 32 and 33 of Poplar households' cards (hereafter New Survey HCS).

99. J.J. Astor and others, The Third Winter of Unemployment: The Report of an Enquiry Undertaken in the Autumn of 1922 (London, 1923); E.W. Bakke, The Unemployed Man: A Social Study (London, 1933); W.H. Beveridge, Unemployment: A Condition of Industry second edition (London, 1930); E.C.P. Lascelles and S.S. Bullock, Dock Labour and Decasualisation (London, 1924); H.A. Mess, Casual Labour at the Docks (London, 1916); also see N. Whiteside, 'Welfare Insurance and Casual Labour: A Study of Administrative Intervention in Industrial Employment 1906-26', Economic History Review, 32 (1979), 507-22.

people revolved not around waged labour and the workplace, but around their domestic lives. It is this fact which accounts for their paucity of strikes, their uninterest in left-wing rank-and-file movements, and their restrictive practices. The concern here then is to explain the estrangement of workers as workers from class politics (for clearly Poplar workers as voters were enthusiastic supporters of a class-inspired local Labour Party).

How important was waged labour in Poplar?

This section is by no means arguing that waged work was of no importance to Poplar people; the militancy of the local unemployed movement (described below) is eloquent testimony to the contrary. Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that paid work was not the central aspect of Poplar people's lives and that its importance in explaining Poplar's politics has therefore been exaggerated by writers like Branson and Duncan and Goodwin.

The first reason for doubting the pertinence of waged labour to Poplar people is the sex composition of Poplar's workforce. A little over a third of Poplar's women above the school-leaving age worked for wages in the 1920s,¹⁰⁰ which accounted in large part for the fact that only two-thirds of the adult population were waged labourers. Contemporary comment is unanimous that women who did work for wages were young, single and far more interested in their future married life than with conditions in the workplace;¹⁰¹ certainly only 16 per cent of Poplar's waged women were married and even those often worked only when they needed to, usually as charwomen.¹⁰² Most Poplar women left work voluntarily on marriage, feeling that to stay on

100. According to the Censuses, 34.5 per cent of women in 1921 and 40.1 per cent of women in 1931 worked for wages.

101. Cole, Organised Labour, p.94; Drake, Women in Trade Unions, p.191 and p.201; O.M. Hueffer, Some of the English: A Study Towards a Study (London, 1930), p.189; E.D. Proud, Welfare Work: Employers' Experiments for Improving Working Conditions in Factories, third edition (London, 1918) p.80.

102. New Survey HCS.

would be to deprive a man of his rightful employment.¹⁰³ A substantial minority of Poplar's paid workers did not see their work as central to their lives then, and they were much more likely to be motivated into political action by issues concerning the community and the home as a result. And as will be shown, these were just the issues around which Poplar Labour Party built its socialism.

The second reason for questioning the idea that the workplace was the dominating factor in Poplar life is the importance in the locality of income from the welfare state. In 1929 a 2 per cent sample survey of Poplar households revealed that no less than 11 per cent of households had no wage earner and relied wholly on state pensions or relief for their income, usually because of old age or through being too ill to seek work and thereby qualify for unemployment benefit.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, 10.2 per cent of the borough's potential wage-earners received unemployment benefit, which increased the locality's reliance on central state welfare still further. Relief payments from the local state were also crucial to local household economies. Over one third of unemployed people in families with one or more members in employment received no unemployment benefit and depended instead on the local Guardians for relief in cash or kind, for example, as did some casual workers and some on short time.¹⁰⁵ Poplar's Board of Guardians was of course notoriously generous and even though its policies became harsher as the decade progressed it still supported significant numbers of Poplar's poor. The importance of state benefits like pensions, unemployment benefit and relief in the household economies of Poplar meant that much attention focussed on them and not on wages; an active

103. E. Hostettler, 'A Dockland Community -- The Isle of Dogs', in Dockland: An Illustrated Historical Survey of Life and Work in East London, edited by R.J.M. Carr (London, 1986), pp.59-70 (p.61); Reed, Elizabeth Pepperell, p.44. Many of my interviewees agreed.

104. New Survey HCS. From the same source it can be seen that 13.5 per cent of Poplar's unemployed under the age of 65 were incapacitated and could not work.

105. New Survey HCS.

unemployed movement demanded higher levels of benefit and the local councillors went to gaol for the sake of increased relief payments with massive popular support.

The third reason for doubting the importance of the workplace to Poplar's politics is the locality's flourishing informal economy. This was yet another source of income which had nothing to do with the workplace and which thus to some extent reduced the relevance of workplace relations and processes to people's lives and so to their politics. Quite apart from the neighbourhood 'survival networks' which helped the most poverty-stricken families of a street by pooling the street's resources (and which will be detailed in chapter IV),¹⁰⁶ there was an informal economy within neighbourhoods. Better-off families paid neighbours to babysit for them as much to help the less fortunate as to convenience themselves; 'my mum saw them alright', as one man whose mother owned a successful grocery shop in Poplar recalled.¹⁰⁷ Cornershops, wholly reliant on local customers, gave credit for a week and longer if necessary (which is perhaps why Poplar Labour Party saw shopkeepers as allies), and the pawnbroker, the moneylender and even the church were also strategies for coping with hard times. Many families kept chickens and grew vegetables for food and driftwood from the river was a major source of fuel. Children were especially resourceful in earning coppers, by selling Poplar Borough Council's free disinfectant from door to door, doing errands for neighbours, building grottoes on pavements to impress passers-by, selling bundles of packing-case splinters as firewood, or acting as lookouts for a group of gambling men. The methods used by adults to earn money without a job were almost as various. Gambling was a very common past-time; many men boxed for cash prizes; one woman in every street would earn a few pence from her neighbours every week by taking and returning items to and from the

106. E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War One', History Workshop Journal, 15 (1983), 4-27 (p.1).

107. interview with Mr Franklin by the author, 22.6.1987.

pawnbrokers; allotment produce was sold; costers hired out their barrows for moonlight flits; men repaired boots while claiming unemployment benefit.¹⁰⁸ These alternative sources of income reduced the centrality of the wage packet to household budgets and thus lessened the importance of waged labour. This is perhaps symbolised in the difference between the rowdiness of Poplar's unemployed, described by a worker in a centre for unemployed men in Poplar, compared to the devastation wreaked on Max Cohen when he lost his job. Cohen was a skilled worker whose identity was clearly based on his labour while Poplar men saw their waged work as less important to them and were therefore less shattered when they were made redundant.¹⁰⁹

The existence of these alternative income sources and the non-involvement and uninterest of women in paid labour reduced the prominence of waged work in Poplar people's lives then, and this accounts in part for their apathy in improving workplace conditions; there were other ways of surviving and more important issues to consider.¹¹⁰

The causes of workplace rebellion in Poplar

If the organisational apathy of Poplar workers can be explained by pointing to their emotional and economic independence from waged labour, how can rebellious behaviour like restrictive practices be accounted for?

The autonomy of Poplar people from paid labour was never total of course, but even their limited autonomy had its effect; they used work on their own terms as much as they could, and hence the workplace resistance already

108. Each of these specific examples comes from the interviews by the author with people living in Poplar in the 1920s, or from transcripts of interviews held at the IHT, at the Family Life Oral History Archive at Essex University and in Richman, Ely a Flag for Poplar.

109. M. Cohen, I Was One of the Unemployed (London, 1945). Poplar's unemployed are described in L. Paul, Angry Young Man (London, 1951), p.224.

110. This argument would not hold in the 1930s, after the introduction of the Means Test and the removal of relief from local Guardians had reduced incomes from sources other than waged labour and made life on the dole much harsher.

charted. Poplar dockers, for example, worked for only three days and then signed on for three, in order to maximise their income;¹¹¹ female factory workers were boisterous and undisciplined no matter how many times the management threatened them with dire penalties;¹¹² pilfering from work was never considered a crime, especially by dockers. 'It was said that if you saw the dockers running out of the Dock Gate you would know they had been working on the Rum Quay and further, if they stopped running they would fall down'.¹¹³

It will now be suggested that this kind of workplace resistance should be seen, not in structuralist terms as a form of unconscious class struggle in the manner of Price, but rather as a social expression of Poplar's culture, of the communal sensibilities of its people and their way of behaving.

Much of Poplar's workers' rebellion can be accounted for by the strength of 'the ordinary working man's desire for justice, not just for himself but for others too',¹¹⁴ which a commentator who had lived in the East End for twenty-five years described. Other, less elevated, cultural practices also explain some of the rowdiness in Poplar's factories and docks. East Enders enjoyed a knees-up and a drink; hence the practice of smuggling bottles of port into Bryant and May's factory and drinking on the

111. Bakke, The Unemployed Man, p.294; Whiteside, 'Welfare Insurance and Casual Labour', p.521.

112. Hackney Local History Library, Bryant and May archive (hereafter BMA), Fairfield Works Committee, minutes of meetings, passim.

113. THLHL, typescript autobiography of W. Norman, 1975, p.23. Pilfering at the docks is also described in J. Bloomberg, Looking Back: A Docker's Life (London, 1979) and in G. Hardwicke Keepers of the Door: The History of the Port of London Authority Police (London, 1980). Lightermen's perks are described in Gosling, Up and Down Stream, p.40.

114. R. Kennedy-Cox, Through the Dock Gates (London, 1939), p.250.

production line to celebrate a girl's wedding;¹¹⁵ Poplar people could be riotous, hence the refusal of factory workers to form neat, orderly queues in works' canteens.¹¹⁶ This vigour and independence and high humour of Poplar people gave the locality its 'virile personality',¹¹⁷ and its character and causes are explored in much more detail in chapter IV.

Given this importance of cultural practices to workplace struggle, it is crucial not to see class as the sole catalyst of workers' rebellion; workplace rebellion may be a result of non-class based motivations. The discussion of Poplar people's high spirits in chapter IV relates their causes to the nature of domestic life in Poplar, not to an understanding of waged labour. Everyday resistance in the forms of restrictive practices or defiance of management may be understood in terms of class, or they may simply represent East Enders' high spirits. Strikes for reinstatement may reflect class solidarity but may equally well symbolise the bonds of kin and neighbourhood in the workplace which the chapter IV discusses. Similarly, workplace resistance involves issues of gender as well as class which, like joie de vivre and solidarity, can be connected to sources beyond waged labour. The desire to be in control and powerful at the heart of the ideology of masculinity operates in the workplace, as a previous section argued, but its source is in the home; masculine identity has been traced by theorists of male gendering to the practices of the family and especially to the role of the father.¹¹⁸ Cultural

115. M.D. Reed, Elizabeth Pepperell, 21 June 1914 to 24 May 1971, (London, 1973), p.28.

116. Hackney Local History Library, Bryant and May archive (hereafter BMA), Fairfield Works' Committee, minutes of meetings, passim.

117. W.H. Lax, Let's Go to Poplar (London, 1929), p.36.

118. T. Carrigan, B. Connell and J. Lee, 'Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', Theory and Society, 14 (1985), 551-604. For a discussion of how work can also be a source of masculine authority and power, see C. Cockburn, 'The Material of Male Power', Feminist Review, 9 (1981), 41-58; and M. Savage, 'Capitalist and Patriarchal Relations:

sensibilities rooted in social relations outside workplaces shaped industrial struggle in Poplar; workplace resistance must therefore be interpreted as an expression of Poplar's culture not necessarily related to class consciousness. Clearly the amalgam of class, politics, waged work and the workplace which informs so much of labour history and locality-studies needs to be problematised.

There are therefore several reasons for considering paid labour and the wage relation to have less relevance to politics in Poplar than is suggested by the workplace theories of politicisation often found in locality-studies. The first is the disjuncture between the politics of the workplace and those of the local Labour Party previously explored. The second is the suggestion that waged labour was not of overwhelming importance to Poplar people, and the third is that such workplace rebellion as did take place had its sources in social relations and cultural sensibilities with roots in domestic rather than industrial life.

Having explained the estrangement of local people from the arena of waged work by stressing that their priorities and practices were mostly formed by concerns unconnected with paid labour, it is obvious that analysis of Poplar's mass politics must be directed to the community outside Poplar's factories, docks and workshops. That task is undertaken in Chapter IV. The aim of the remainder of this chapter is to explain what shaped the class-based beliefs of Poplar Labour Party, and again analysis has to turn to the institutions of Poplar's civil society outside of realm of waged labour, given the political disjuncture between the Party and local labour organisations. But first, the politics of the Party must be presented in a little detail.

Preston Cotton Weaving 1890-1940', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group, (London, 1985), pp.177-194. For a critique of this male/production, female/reproduction dichotomy when it makes its appearance in social history and theory, see J. Bornat, 'What About that Lass of Yours Being in the Union?' Textile Workers and their Union in Yorkshire 1888-1922', in Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work, edited by L. Davidoff and B. Westover, (London, 1986), pp.76-98.

The policies of Poplar Labour Party

Poplar Labour Party was socialist; it saw itself as 'class-conscious Socialists working together, using the whole machinery of local government and Parliament for the transformation of Capitalist Society into Socialism'.¹¹⁹ This section studies the precise characteristics of its brand of socialism.

It was not a party committed to immediate and bloody revolution; its policies were built on the conviction that social and political reform comes slowly in our country. It will come more quickly as our children are better trained and educated. In the meantime, social conditions must be faced and money found for dealing with the destitution and misery we see all around.¹²⁰

This was the foundation of Poplarism. One element of Poplarism, the council's minimum wage policy, has already been described; the Labour Party believed 'it is the duty of a public authority to be a model employer',¹²¹ and this also meant paying men and women the same wages for the same job.

The second element of Poplarism was the level of relief paid by Poplar Guardians. The administration of relief by local Boards of Guardians in the 1920s was still based upon the Poor Law of 1834; its guiding principle was deterrence.

The relief was to be given in such a way and to such an extent that the life of a pauper would be more disagreeable than the most disagreeable way of earning a living outside. This was ensured in various ways, of which the favourites were humiliation, underfeeding and overwork.¹²²

119. G. Lansbury in Key, Red Poplar, p.3.

120. THLHL, Bow and Bromley Labour Party 1909 General Election handbill.

121. Key, Red Poplar, p.46. Poplar was neither the only nor the first borough to think this; see N. Buck, 'The Analysis of State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Cities: The Case of Municipal Labour Policy in East London, 1886-1914', in Urbanisation and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society, edited by M. Dear and A.J. Scott, (London, 1981), pp.501-34.

122. R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London, 1951), p.77.

Poplar fought against these 'pernicious principles';¹²³ it improved conditions within the workhouse,¹²⁴ but the essence of its Poor Law policy was 'to fight for the decent treatment of the poor outside the workhouse, and hang the rates!'¹²⁵ Thus in 1925 the Poplar Board were paying an average of 7s.6d. to each of its unemployed applicants for relief, the highest per capita figure in England and Wales; the national average was 4s.10d. Poplar also had the third highest ratio of relief given to the unemployed in the country, after Chester-Le-Street and Lanchester: 1,174 per 1,000 of population.¹²⁶ There were three administrative causes of this generosity: Poplar Guardians always paid an applicant's rent in full; they disregarded all the income of a household except that of the head;¹²⁷ and their scale of relief was also higher than the recommendation of the Ministry of Health.

Another part of Poplar council's battle against local poverty was its provision of local services, and a pamphlet published by Poplar Labour Party just before the 1925 council elections catalogued its achievements during its first six years in office.¹²⁸ It mentioned 350 new council dwellings either built or being completed, and low rents; it boasted of having built three slipper baths, two open-air swimming pools, five wash-houses with mechanical washers, and of improving the municipal electricity service and libraries; it claimed streets were cleansed and sewers

123. PMBC, Guilty and Proud of it: Poplar's Answer (Poplar, 1922), p.7.

124. G. Lansbury, The Development of the Humane Administration of the Poor Law under the Poplar Board of Guardians (Woolwich, 1907).

125. G. Lansbury, My Life (London, 1928), p.133.

126. PRO, HLG68/14, Domiciliary Relief in England and Wales, November 1925.

127. PRO, MH68/214, minute 8.2.1922.

128. PMBC, The Work of Six Years 1919-25 (Poplar, 1925). The provision of such municipal services (although rarely on such a scale) was common in the inter-war period; see R. Lee, 'Uneven Zenith: Towards a Geography of the High Period of Municipal Medicine in England and Wales', Journal of Historical Geography, 14 (1988), 260-80.

flushed more frequently; new maternity and child welfare and sunshine clinics had opened, and unemployment relief works had been organised. Clearly Poplar council focussed most on the welfare needs of local people, and this prioritisation of non-industrial issues occurred even among some local trade unions.¹²⁹

The funding of these services came from both local sources and regional government. Locally, rates were high, as the table on the next page shows, averaging 21s.10d. in the pound between 1919 and 1929. Accountants at the Ministry of Health felt that 20s. was the maximum rate which should wisely be levied,¹³⁰ but Poplar Labour Party had little concern for the fiscal logic of rates. As John Scurr, a prominent member of the Party, argued,

We should never allow ourselves to be caught in the meshes of an argument as to rate reduction. To concede that rates should be reduced by lowering the efficiency of municipal services is distinctly anti-social. It presupposes that such expenditure is wasteful and should be limited. If this argument is true, then there is no need for a Labour Municipal Policy at all. On the contrary, we ought to say, abolish the municipality and so get rid of rates altogether. If a gain to the community can be proved by doubling expenditure out of the rates, we should be prepared to say, let such expenditure be incurred.¹³¹

It helped Poplar's councillors' enthusiasm for this argument that the majority of their constituents did not feel the full impact of the rates levied by the council, because most lived in houses still covered by the war-time rent control legislation.¹³² It was local businesses, who could not vote in local elections unless their owners lived in the borough (and most did not), which bore the brunt of these rates. The political mobilisation among Poplar's

129. Railway Review, 4.7.1919 and 16.9.1927. These reports from Poplar branches listed their interests and concentrated much more on the activities of the council than on the industrial matters.

130. PRO, HLG52/1343, minute 3.7.1922.

131. J. Scurr, Labour and the Rates: A Policy for Labour Councillors (London, 1923), p.6.

132. Gillespie, 'Economic and Political Change in the East End', p.8.

TABLE 5

POPLAR METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S OUTSTANDING LOANS
AND RATES LEVIED 1919-29

	outstanding loans (£000s)		average rate levied in the £
	general (excluding housing and electricity)	housing	
1919-20	155	44	15s.6d.
1920-21	168	142	22s.10d.
1921-22	175	165	18s.3d.
1922-23	211	163	22s.8d.
1923-24	231	194	23s.0d.
1924-25	258	256	23s.0d.
1925-26	258	318	23s.0d.
1926-27	267	386	25s.0d.
1927-28	241	300	23s.0d.
1928-29	236	441	23s.4d.

Source: PMBC, Abstract of Accounts for the Year Ending March 30th 1930 (Poplar, 1930), pp.165-66 and p.168.

businesses around this issue will be examined in the next chapter.

Poplar council also funded their projects with central government grants and with loans from the London County Council sanctioned by the government.¹³³ The table on the previous page details the extent of their debts in the 1920s. Poplar council was adept at what the Ministry of Health saw as 'financial wangling',¹³⁴ by which it meant a form of debt-financing adopted by Poplar after the reform of the rating law in 1921; the council was permitted large overdrafts on the strength of payments due to it in the future from the Metropolitan Common Poor Fund. And many of Poplar's public works schemes for its unemployed were financed by the Unemployment Grants Committee, a body established by central government in December 1920 to help overcome the unemployment of the post-war slump.¹³⁵ Poplar Labour Party was obviously committed to state intervention as a strategy for dealing with all forms of exploitation: unemployment, poverty, ill-health, women's household drudgery, housing.

Poplar Labour Party worked extremely hard for many years to win support for these policies; people had to be convinced of their validity. The methods used by the Party to persuade people to support their policies were various. Most common were public meetings. Will Crooks, a major figure in Poplar's pre-war labour politics and Poplar's first Labour mayor, held so many meetings outside the gates of the East India Dock that the spot became known as 'Crook's College',¹³⁶ and other favourite locations in the 1920s included Poplar Town Hall, Bromley Public Hall, Victoria Park, the open space in front of St Michael and All Angels in Bow, and East India Dock Road. Speakers used the language and humour of their audiences to make their points. Here is Will Crooks during a water famine:

133. for details see PMBC, Abstract of Accounts.

134. PRO, MH57/94, 'The Effect Upon the Poor Law System of the General Strike and Coal Dispute, 1926' (unpaginated).

135. PRO, LAB4/1-9.

136. Haw, From Workhouse to Westminster, p.58.

When I got home last night, my wife said, 'Will, the water's come on at last; but just look at it-- it's not fit to drink!' So I went to the tap and saw a lot of little things swimming around in the water. The wife was alarmed, and asked what should we do. 'My dear,' I replied, 'for goodness sake don't say anything about it to anybody. If this gets to the ears of the company they might charge us for the fish as well as for the water.'¹³⁷

During the Poplarism episode, Poplar Labour Party did not rely on the inevitability of local support; they recognised the need to canvas vigorously for it.¹³⁸ A Joint Publicity Council was established by the Labour Party and trades council, public meetings were constantly held, house-to-house visits were made by Party activists and letters were sent to every house and to every schoolchild in the borough explaining the action of the council.¹³⁹ As Charlie Key, one of Poplar's younger Labour councillors, put it to local people, 'we came to you and told you what sort of work we wanted to do'.¹⁴⁰ As a result of all this activity, Key claimed that 'there is today no electorate in the country more politically-educated than that of Poplar borough.'¹⁴¹

The two main characteristics of Poplar Labour Party's socialist policies can thus be summarised as statist welfare provision and political education.¹⁴² Discussion now turns to the sources of these policies: the political beliefs of the Party.

Certain writers have argued that working-class politics

137. Haw, From Workhouse to Westminster, p.59.

138. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury. My Father (London, 1934), p.70.

139. PRO, CAB24/127 CP3291, Directorate of Intelligence, Report on the Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, 8.9.1921.

140. THLHL, Poplar Labour Party 1925 Guardian election handbill.

141. Key, Red Poplar, p.7.

142. The term 'statist' is coined by Savage to refer to the use of the state to increase working-class security against the ravages of the capitalist system; Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, p.20.

are statist when the state is especially prominent in the economy.¹⁴³ A cause of Poplar Labour Party's statism then might be an unusual degree of state intervention in Poplar's economy; this possibility will now be explored.

One intrusion by the central state into the local arena was through its employment legislation. In 1923 a legal textbook summarised the links between 'the worker and the state' under four headings (excluding trade union law and the national insurance system): wages legislation, time conditions and health and safety at work.¹⁴⁴ These laws had a geography. They did not affect everywhere equally; they were most relevant to poor industrial areas like Poplar. The centrepiece of legislation on wages was the Trade Boards, which were established and funded by the government in badly organised industries and consisted of representatives of capital and labour meeting to establish legally-enforceable minimum wage rates. Several covered industries which employed substantial numbers of Poplar workers: the clothing industry, confectionery manufacture, box-making, food preserving and the tobacco industry. Although the enforcement of the minimum wage was a problem,¹⁴⁵ the state was nonetheless involved in controlling the wage levels of Poplar workers. Health and safety legislation also affected Poplar to a large degree because so many of its industries were dangerous. The docks for example were second only to the mines in their numbers of industrial fatalities each year, Poplar's railways and chemical works were also prone to accidents and thus especially concerned with the laws concerning workplace health and safety.

143. see for example Gillespie, 'Economic and Political Change in the East End', and Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics.

144. F. Tillyard, The Worker and the State: Wages, Hours, Safety and Health (London, 1923).

145. It was estimated in 1930 that one in eight Greater London firms covered by the Trade Boards paid less than the minimum rate: New Survey, II, p.34; and see Dobbs, The Clothing Workers and Vesselitsky, The Homemaker and Her Outlook.

Apart from legislation, the state was implicated in Poplar's economy in other ways. Rent control has already been mentioned; the state was also involved in Poplar's employment structure. In 1929, 10.1 per cent of Poplar's workers relied on public authorities for their job.¹⁴⁶ At times of high unemployment, government money was used to fund public works schemes, and some Poplar women went on government-funded training courses to help them find employment as domestic servants.¹⁴⁷ And of course the importance of state welfare benefits to Poplar's household economies has already been described.

The state was thus highly visible in Poplar's economy, and the suggestion that this may encourage political action rather than industrial may be apposite to Poplar's workers. Local railwaymen, for example, argued for a political fund to fight their battles, passing a resolution in 1922 which said:

That it be an instruction to the National Executive Committee, in conjunction with the executive of the Trades Union Congress to use every means in their power to promote among constituent bodies of both organisations a fund to be used entirely for election expenses and propaganda for Parliamentary, County Council, Borough, or Urban Council, and Guardians for candidates run by the Labour Party. Such funds to be allocated 50 per cent to headquarters and 50 per cent to local branches.¹⁴⁸

A local preference for political action, based on a perception of the potential of state intervention, may have contributed towards Poplar's industrial quiescence then, and the local prominence of the state might also have been a reason for Poplar Labour Party's extensive statist programme of municipal socialism. However, there are no references in the writings and speeches of Poplar politicians to the prominence of the state in the economy

146. This figure represents labour employed in non-profit-making public authorities, and includes workers permanently employed by the Port of London Authority, and employees of, for example, the Post Office, Poplar council and the London County Council. It excludes the many working on the railways and for gas companies whose profits were limited by law; New Survey HCS.

147. PRO MH55/230, letter 10.3.1924.

148. Railway Review, 5.5.1922, p.14.

of Poplar borough; indeed, apart from the fact of unemployment, there are few references to the economy at all. The next section turns to some of the more obviously important influences on Poplar Labour Party's politics: the class politics of local left-wing groupings.

Left-wing political groups in Poplar

Poplar has a long history of socialist groups, quite apart from the Labour Party itself,¹⁴⁹ and this section argues that the politicians of Poplar Labour Party were particularly influenced by the arguments of four left-wing organisations which were active in the borough: the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party, the Workers' Socialist Federation and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. The politics of each group in turn are outlined, and their contribution towards the statist welfarism of Poplar Labour Party elaborated.

The Social Democratic Federation

In the late nineteenth century the most prominent left-wing group in Poplar was the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

The SDF was a Marxist revolutionary party. Its Bow branch was especially active and four of Poplar's most respected councillors in the 1920s, George Lansbury, John Scurr, Alf Watts and John Wooster, joined it in the late 1880s or early 1890s. However, H.M. Hyndman, the leader of the SDF, was prone to decidedly non-Marxist aberrations which climaxed with his support for the imperialist Boer War. Not surprisingly, his Poplar members abandoned him, many to work for the Independent Labour Party.

The SDF did have one lasting impact on these Poplar activists, however, and that was an interest in the possibility of socialist local government. In 1887, Hyndman had published a radical plan for the government of

149. F. Bedarida, 'Urban Growth and Social Structure in Nineteenth-Century Poplar', London Journal, 1 (1975), 159-88; P. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914 (London, 1967).

London the introduction of which was more or less copied by Lansbury in a pamphlet he wrote on London for Labour.¹⁵⁰ Hyndman's ideas more generally were virtually a blueprint for what Poplar Labour Party was to do in the 1920s; to alleviate working-class poverty, he advocated extensive municipal services, including housing, baths, wash-houses and unemployment relief works. The SDF was one source of Poplar Labour Party's statism then.

The SDF was also firmly committed to local democratic government in which power lay with the voters rather than with the politicians.¹⁵¹ This too was an aspect of Poplar Labour Party's socialism, but its source did not lie wholly with the SDF.

The Independent Labour Party

A strong belief in democracy, especially at the local level, was the main contribution of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to Poplar Labour Party's politics.

The socialist ILP flourished in Poplar in the years preceding the Great War, particularly through the efforts of the journalist and historian R.C.K. Ensor who had a flat in Blackwall,¹⁵² and there were two active branches in the borough in the 1920s which frequently advertised their meetings in the local press. The position of the ILP within the Labour Party was somewhat uncertain after the adoption of the 1918 constitution, but by 1923 it was building an identity as a left-wing ginger group and think-tank, an identity consolidated in 1926 with its adoption of the document Socialism in Our Time which demanded a universal minimum wage and the nationalisation of

150. H.M. Hyndman, A Commune for London (London, 1887); G. Lansbury, London for Labour (London, no date).

151. A leading SDF member, Harry Quelch, with whom George Lansbury campaigned in the 1890s, was a strong advocate of local democracy; see J. Clarke, A. Cochrane and C. Smart, Ideologies of Welfare: From Dreams to Disillusion (London, 1987), p.80.

152. Bodleian Library, R.C.K. Ensor papers (uncatalogued).

industry.¹⁵³ Not all sections of the ILP approved of Socialism in Our Time, but, although there is no direct evidence, it seems highly likely that the Poplar branches did, for later in the decade they were definitely on the extreme left of the ILP, eventually leaving to join the Communist Party.¹⁵⁴ In the 1920s a sixth of Poplar's Labour councillors and Guardians had connections with the ILP.¹⁵⁵

A fundamental part of ILP socialism was its commitment to democracy. It was itself an organisation with weak central control over its regional parties, and its 1922 constitution extended this democratic impulse to the industrial arena with an advocacy of workers' control largely inspired by the Guild Socialism of G.D.H. Cole. For much longer however the ILP had been committed to political democracy, supporting the women's suffrage struggle for example; it wanted a decentralised state too, and this led it vigorously to defend local government. An ILP pamphlet of 1911 demanded that local authorities be allowed to 'strike out boldly along new lines freed from the restraining and paralysing power of the [central state's] Local Government Board'.¹⁵⁶ In the 1920s it was ILP delegates who proposed the few motions on local government at the annual Labour Party conferences; at the 1918 conference George Lansbury's close friend Fred Jowett desired 'to confirm and establish liberty of action upon municipal bodies in matters of local government ... Government interference in local affairs should be confined

153. R.E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 (London, 1966).

154. Communist Party Library, papers of C.K. Cullen, passim. Cullen was the secretary of Poplar ILP and of the communist Revolutionary Policy Committee of the party; the newsletter of the latter was published from East India Dock Road, Poplar, and copies of it are in Cullen's papers.

155. see the sources for Table 8 of the occupations of Poplar's councillors and Guardians; and the papers of R.C.K. Ensor.

156. J.K. Hardie, The Common Good: An Essay in Municipal Government (Manchester, 1911), p.12.

to giving information, in giving grants for work done, and not in fettering local authorities as hitherto'.¹⁵⁷

This democratic ethos was largely responsible for the high priority given by Poplar Labour Party to the political education of local working-class people. Party activists 'believed their duty in life was to live lives of service, teaching the masses to think and act for themselves ... [they] had no intention of creating a huge party organisation controlled from the top, but were true democrats'.¹⁵⁸ Charlie Key, for example, wanted the political emancipation of the working class and so argued that 'in Poplar, if anywhere, was there a need for the workers to take control of local government and use it for their own betterment'.¹⁵⁹ Political education thus also implied mass participation in the formulation of the Party's politics.

This participation in fact tended to take the form of support for the Party's policies; as has already been suggested, and with one or two significant exceptions outlined below, the Party took the initiative in policy formation and sought only a mandate from local people. Nonetheless, councillors were always ready to listen to constituents,¹⁶⁰ and Labour mayors refused to wear their chain of office and robes in the council chamber to stress their closeness to ordinary men and women.¹⁶¹ The council Works Committee gave the local organisations of unemployed

157. Labour Party, Report of the Eighteenth Annual Conference 1918 (London, 1918), p.71.

158. Lansbury, My Life, p.2.

159. Key, Red Poplar, p.6. There are parallels here with the practices of the new urban left of the early 1980s in England; see M. Boddy and C. Fudge (eds), Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives (London, 1984), and J. Gyford, The Politics of Local Socialism (London, 1985).

160. This was a common form of praise in the councillors' obituaries in the local newspapers; THLHL, biographical press cuttings collection.

161. East London Advertiser, 5.2.1921 and 28.11.1925.

a voice in the allocation of relief work,¹⁶² and the council agitated for more workers' control in the Port of London Authority,¹⁶³ for the democratic control of London's police,¹⁶⁴ and for reasonable remuneration for London county councillors in order that more workers could become active on the London County Council.¹⁶⁵ All this was because, in Lansbury's words,

we have got to get in the minds of people that they don't need governors; governors are only needed by men who want privileges at the expense of others, by men who wish to hold the means of life against others ... I do not care much about how people are to get things, but I care very much about stimulating them to demand things.¹⁶⁶

This faith in individuals' rights will recur in later discussions of citizenship and religion in Poplar, but it clearly has roots in the Party's ILP-inspired democratic class politics too.

The belief in democracy which the influence of the ILP encouraged in Poplar Labour Party had effects other than the faith in political education of the masses. One was to increase Poplar's alienation from the rest of the Labour Party, which cared very little for the radical potential of local government.¹⁶⁷

Another effect of its democratic ethos was Poplar council's defiance of the relief policies of the Ministry

162. PMBC, Works Committee, minutes of meetings, 31.10.1921 and 12.12.1921.

163. East London Advertiser, 17.1.1920.

164. LLPA, Final Agenda for the Annual Conference, 1929, p.4.

165. LLPA, Final Agenda for the Annual Conference, 1924, p.6.

166. Daily Herald, 14.1.1913. For discussions of the tension between participation (which means listening to voters) and political education (which means persuading them), see Gyford, The Politics of Local Socialism, and G. Parry (ed), Participation in Politics (Manchester, 1972).

167. J.S. Rowett, 'The Labour Party and Local Government: Theory and Practice in the Inter-War Years' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1979); K. Bassett, 'Labour, Socialism and Local Democracy', in Local Socialism?, edited by Boddy and Fudge, pp.82-108.

of Health, a defiance which reached a peak during the early 1920s but which rumbled on throughout the decade. Contemporary political scientists were unanimous that local authorities were 'but the cells in a living organism'¹⁶⁸ which was the central state, having no powers beyond those the state deigned to grant them. In contrast, Poplar Labour Party wanted the 'placing of all Local Government services under the full control, not of any nominated or co-opted bodies, but of the directly elected representatives of the people'.¹⁶⁹ In 1922, the chair of Poplar's Board of Guardians echoed Jowett's and Hardie's views of the correct relationship between the central state and the local: 'we think that the [ministry's] inspectors should act as friends to all Boards of Guardians, paying them personal visits in order to assist and advise',¹⁷⁰ rather than command and compel.

If the ideas of the SDF were the fount of Poplar Labour Party's statism then, ILP politics were at the heart of its political education and democratic commitment to local government autonomy. The third influential group on the Party's politics, the Workers' Socialist Federation, stressed both these issues.

The Workers' Socialist Federation

Sylvia Pankhurst's organisation went through many changes of name during its existence, beginning as the East London Federation of Suffragettes, changing in 1915 to the Workers' Suffrage Federation, in 1916 becoming the Workers' Socialist Federation, in June 1920 declaring itself the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International) and finally ending up as the Workers'

168. H. Finer, English Local Government (London, 1933), p.9.

169. Labour Party Library, Labour Party Advisory Committee on Local Government, papers presented, Joint Research and Information Department of the Advisory Committee, 'The Reform of the Poor Law', memorandum 78, by G. Lansbury, February 1924, p.8 (my emphasis).

170. PRO, MH68/215, Report on the Deputation of Poplar Labour Party to the Ministry of Health, 20.6.1922.

Sylvia Pankhurst before the Great War

Source: Fawcett Library



172. Sylvia Pankhurst, Biographical Sketch, cuttings collection; International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam; Sylvia Pankhurst papers (hereafter SP), file 14, Workers' Socialist Federation, minutes of meetings, 7.8.1917 and file 179, Workers' Socialist Federation, minutes of meetings, 4.3.1917.

173. SP, MS 29/1419, House of Lords' Judgment on Robert Hopwood and others, 7 April 1918, p.5.

Communist Party in January 1922.¹⁷¹ For convenience it will always be referred to here as the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF). As might be guessed, these changes in title represent the political evolution of Pankhurst and her devoted band of followers. These will now be traced, along with the changing relationship between Poplar Labour Party and the WSF.

Sylvia Pankhurst arrived at Old Ford, in the north of Poplar borough, in 1913 to bring the battle for the vote to working women, and this democratic urge never left her politics, as will be argued below. Many of Poplar's most prominent Labour councillors were involved in Pankhurst's wartime suffrage campaign: the whole of the Lansbury family, Julia Scurr (a Labour councillor and Guardian), Florence Key (Charlie's wife and an activist in a teachers' trade union), Charlie Sumner and his wife (Sumner was Poplar's first Labour Guardian), Alf Watts and his daughter Lil, Joe Banks (the Party agent) and Nellie Cressall (a councillor and wife of the secretary of Poplar Labour Party).¹⁷² The involvement of these influential men and women in the suffrage struggle, and in the other issues with which the women's movement was concerned at the time, accounts for the feminism of Poplar Labour Party, a feminism expressed for example in its policy of paying male and female municipal employees the same wages for the same job.¹⁷³ This feminism was the most important legacy of the WSF to the Party, and it encouraged both its welfare statism and its democratic impulse. The politics of women's issues in Poplar will therefore be discussed in some detail in this sub-section.

171. for a detailed history of the organisation, see L. Jones, 'Sylvia Pankhurst and the Workers' Socialist Federation: The Red Twilight 1918-24' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1972).

172. THLHL, biographical press cuttings collection; International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Sylvia Pankhurst papers (hereafter SPP), file 14, Workers' Socialist Federation, minutes of meetings, 7.6.1917 and file 119, Workers' Socialist Federation, minutes of meetings, 4.3.1917.

173. PRO, HLG57/147B, House of Lords' Judgement on Roberts and Hopwood and others, 3 April 1925, p.5.

Poplar's women councillors were in the forefront of Poplarism. Four of them -- Julia Scurr, Jenny Mackay, Susan Lawrence and Nellie Cressall -- sent a defiant letter to their supporters when they were in Holloway Prison in 1921:

As always, it is the people only who can help the people. If the unemployed are to receive their rights; if the poor are to be relieved of the burden of the rates; there must be a strong and determined popular movement.¹⁷⁴

There were several political women's organisations in Poplar: the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Poplar Women's Labour Guild (PWLG) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. They existed to give women a voice in the predominantly male world of politics.

That the polity was a male concern is undeniable; all of Poplar's married women councillors had husbands who were councillors too, almost as if they needed a politically active husband to justify their own political enthusiasm, and Hearn has begun to theorise this identification of the male with the state in terms of the centrality of violence to masculine identity.¹⁷⁵ On a more pragmatic level, women in Poplar found it difficult to become involved in politics because of the burden of childcare imposed upon them. Most of the women councillors were childless; Nellie Cressall had six children but her own mother looked after them when Nellie was out on council or Party business.¹⁷⁶ Yet these responsibilities were precisely the reason it was felt that the voice of women should be heard through their own organisations; women were seen to have specific interests and gifts to bring to the political arena which could justifiably be institutionalised in separate organisations.

In public work the mother mind is especially required, and that wise and tender influence which sees the necessity for cultivating the high

174. Labour Party Library, Poplar Women's Labour Guild archive, letter from A. Susan Lawrence, Jennie Mackay, Nellie Cressall and Julia Scurr, no date [1921].

175. For a theoretical discussion of the masculinisation of politics, see J. Hearn, The Gender of Oppression: Men, Masculinity and the Critique of Marxism (Brighton, 1987).

176. interview with Mrs. Sumner, 2.6.1987.

faculties while attending to material well-being. Noble aims must ever be kept in view.¹⁷⁷

Women were the 'mother mind', and were meant to have 'special regard to the needs of women, children, and those who are helpless'.¹⁷⁸ Certainly in Poplar women councillors were very rarely appointed to council committees other than maternity and child welfare and housing, both 'women's issues'.¹⁷⁹

However, 'the policy of awakening womanhood throughout the world' was also 'the policy of social care and reconstruction'.¹⁸⁰ If, in the words of Nellie Cressall, 'home's home, and running a home is a woman's business and should be the thing that really matters to her',¹⁸¹ women's domestic skills and qualities -- mothering, kindness-- could be a radical force. There are several examples of this. The suffrage campaign was based on the belief that the womanly qualities of care and nurturing were essential to the polity,¹⁸² and this argument doubled in force for many women when confronted with the horror of the First World War. 'Women', argued Sylvia Pankhurst, 'who are without any political power to stay it, are always the heaviest sufferers by any war',¹⁸³ and women, many thought, were therefore natural pacifists. Pankhurst and some of the Lansburies joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and several women were on the committees

177. J.M.E. Brownlow, Women's Work in Local Government (England and Wales) (London, 1911), p.213. See also J. Lewis, 'Beyond Suffrage: English Feminism in the 1920s', Maryland Historian, 6 (1975), 1-17, and M. Stacey and M. Price, Women, Power and Politics (London, 1981).

178. Brownlow, Women in Local Government, p.4.

179. PMBC, List of Members, 10 vols (Poplar, 1919-29).

180. Women's Dreadnought, 8.3.1914.

181. Daily Herald, 12.12.1930.

182. R. Strachey, The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement of Great Britain (London, 1928).

183. Women's Dreadnought, 1.8.1914. Muriel Lester, a local social worker and Labour Party activist, concurred; M. Lester, Kill or Cure? (Nashville, 1937), p.15 and p.57.

The gender of war

Source: E.S. Pankhurst, The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the World War (London, 1932), opposite page 288



"HANDS OFF THE RING"
Principal Scene in the GRAND CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME - European Theatre
Continuous performance - Prices as usual

of the League of Nations Union branch in the borough.¹⁸⁴ The pacifism of the WSF was reinforced by its socialist conviction that wars were fought only to increase capitalist profits,¹⁸⁵ and pacifism played a prominent part in Poplar's politics. It will be discussed in more detail in chapters II and V.

Other radical politics stemmed from women's domestic role. The Women's Co-operative Guild campaigned on a wide range of issues during the inter-war years, from divorce and birth-control to shopping and housing,¹⁸⁶ and a deputation of its Poplar members visited the council in May 1921 to support their relief policy from which women, as managers of the household economy, especially benefited;¹⁸⁷ as the imprisoned women councillors realised, relief policy was 'a woman's question; for it is a fight for the home.'¹⁸⁸ The Guild was especially keen to demand adequate public servicing of women's needs, and the WSF in Poplar shared this commitment to the public provision of essential

184. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Yearly Reports, 14 vols (London, 1915-30); East London Advertiser, 24.7.1921. For histories of the women's peace movement in Great War, see J.V. Newberry, 'Anti-War Suffragists', History, 62 (1977), 411-25, and A. Wiltsher, Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the First World War (London, 1985). For the Women's International League, see G. Bussey and M. Tims, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915-65: A Record of Fifty Years' Work (London, 1965). For the League of Nations Union, see D.S. Birn, The League of Nations Union 1918-45 (Oxford, 1981).

185. Workers' Dreadnought, 1.8.1914; G. Lansbury, 'Why Socialists Should be Pacifists', Fact, 7 (1937), 5-74.

186. Women's Co-operative Guild, The Women's Co-operative Guild: Notes on its History, Organisation and Work (London, 1920); J. Gaffin and D. Thoms, Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild (Manchester, 1983).

187. East London Advertiser, 27.5.1922. Relief was given in Poplar almost equally to men and women; in contrast, women were entitled to unemployment benefit much more rarely than were men, and this too may help to account for women's support for Poplarism; London County Council, London Statistics, 9 vols (London, 1919-29).

188. Labour Party Library, Poplar Women's Labour Guild archive, letter from Lawrence, Mackay, Scurr and Cressall.



Women carrying bread from Poplar Board of Guardians, 1921

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

services; during the Great War, Sylvia Pankhurst established a cost-price restaurants, maternity and child welfare clinics and creches for local women.¹⁸⁹ Thus the WSF were advocating the same statist strategies as were Poplar Labour Party, for feminist as well as socialist reasons.

The WSF took the way in which women's needs were satisfied to its revolutionary conclusion. 'We, the workers, must take the power into our own hands and destroy the capitalist system which is destroying the lives of our infants and our boys'.¹⁹⁰ The WSF was thus never simply a suffrage organisation; it was communist too. It argued not for women's suffrage alone, but for adult suffrage, and by 1917 the WSF manifesto was 'to secure Human Suffrage: namely, a Vote for every man and woman over 21 years, and to win social and economic freedom for the people'.¹⁹¹ The form of society after the revolution was shaped by the WSF's commitment to democracy as well as to women; household soviets were to be organised in addition to workplace ones so that women could have a say in the running of society.¹⁹²

Sharing Poplar Labour Party's commitment to both statism and democracy, the WSF affiliated to the Party and trades council,¹⁹³ and continued to co-operate with the Labour Party in Poplar until 1920. In 1919, Minnie Lansbury, the secretary of the WSF, was an alderman (sic) in Poplar's first Labour council and in May 1920 the Jolly George incident occurred. The British government had been supplying arms to Poland to help them fight the Bolsheviks at their eastern border. As early as January 1919 a 'Hands Off Russia' committee had been formed at a meeting in

189. E.S. Pankhurst, The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the World War (London, 1932).

190. Workers' Dreadnought, 2.11.1918.

191. SPP, file 162, Workers' Socialist Federation handbill, 1917.

192. Workers' Dreadnought, 19.6.1920.

193. SPP, file 20, Workers' Socialist Federation, minutes of meetings, 19.5.1919.

Farringdon Hall to campaign against this anti-Bolshevik government action; it consisted of extreme left-wingers like Harry Pollitt, Sylvia herself, and her close friend Norah Smyth.¹⁹⁴ For months the committee worked hard, trying to persuade dockers not to load cargoes of arms destined for use by Polish soldiers against the victorious workers of Russia. In May 1920, it became known that the Jolly George, berthed in Poplar's East India Dock, was destined to carry weapons to Poland, and the WSF stepped up its campaign in the area, plastering the walls of Poplar with stickers bearing the 'Hands Off Russia' slogan and handing out copies of Lenin's Appeal to the Toiling Masses to dockers as they left work each day. The masses eventually responded, and refused to load the arms. Dave Adams and Joe Ashley of Poplar Labour Party were involved in this local campaign with the WSF.¹⁹⁵ This is significant because the national Labour Party and the TUC had established their own Council of Action to support the Russian revolution in which Poplar Labour Party never became involved,¹⁹⁶ preferring instead to work with the communist WSF. Obviously, the WSF and Poplar Labour Party shared many of the same concerns.

The Jolly George incident was the last time the WSF co-operated with Poplar Labour Party however. Even before the franchise reform of the 1919 Representation of the People Act, the WSF had rejected what they saw as the bourgeois democratic sham which deceived workers and corrupted their leaders, refused to participate in elections, and were instead working towards 'the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, expressed, not through Parliament and the existing local bodies, but through councils of local

194. Workers' Dreadnought, 4.1.1919.

195. East End News, 22.5.1942 and 15.8.1947; Pollitt, Serving My Time, pp.109-15.

196. Labour Party Library, Council of Action archive, correspondence file. The distinction between the 'Hands Off Russia' committee and the Council of Action does not seem to be appreciated in the historical literature; see for example L.J. Macfarlane, 'Hands Off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920', Past and Present, 38 (1967), 126-52.

delegates from the workers in all industries, on the land, in the Army, Navy and Home'.¹⁹⁷ This anti-parliamentarianism eventually prevented the WSF from working with Poplar Labour Party, and it led Pankhurst to despise especially George Lansbury, whom she saw simply as a careerist.¹⁹⁸

Anti-parliamentarianism also caused the WSF to hesitate before joining the new Communist Party when it formed in 1920. Lenin had dismissed the refusal to participate in elections as an 'infantile disorder' and the WSF eventually agreed to merge with the Communist Party in the hope of persuading it to change its policy.¹⁹⁹ Pankhurst remained unhappy in it however. She objected to 'a sort of political measles called discipline' which she believed was rampant and refused to allow the Communist Party to control the contents of the Workers' Dreadnought.²⁰⁰ She insisted on the need for open political discussion and argued that party branches should 'as far as possible be autonomous'.²⁰¹ This was in contrast to the insistence of the Communist Party that 'instructions of the Party Executive must be treated as absolutely binding upon the individual member'.²⁰² Pankhurst's independence is often noted by historians of the Communist Party, but few recognise its source in Pankhurst's feminist politics, for it was her experience of the coercive powers of the state during her suffrage activities which persuaded her of the need always

197. SPP, file 138, Workers' Socialist Federation, Annual Conference Agenda, 1919. For a full justification of anti-parliamentarianism, see SPP file 149, and the Workers' Dreadnought, 19.3.1921 and 6.10.1923.

198. Pankhurst, The Home Front, p.68. This example could be multiplied many times over.

199. Workers' Dreadnought, 5.2.1921.

200. Workers' Dreadnought, 17.9.1921.

201. Workers' Dreadnought, 30.7.1921 and 10.6.1920.

202. Communist Party of Great Britain, Manual of Party Training, Principles and Organisation (London, 1924), p.45.

to maintain civil liberties.²⁰³ The forced feeding of suffragettes in prison, the notorious 'Cat and Mouse Act', the revival of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the sweeping powers of the Defence of the Realm Act, the treatment of conscientious objectors, the need for prison reform, the anti-conscription campaign: all found space in the Workers' Dreadnought.

This democratic and even libertarian streak paralleled Poplar Labour Party's rejection of central state control, as did the WSF commitment to raising the consciousness of Poplar people by holding many public meetings, organising demonstrations and publishing the Workers' Dreadnought, a newspaper which if people could not buy was given away free to them; and the radicalism of each, their statist welfarism and democratic convictions, surely sustained the other. For although between 1920 and 1924 (when Sylvia Pankhurst left Poplar) the WSF was completely estranged from the local Labour Party, the contacts many of its councillors had, either with her or with her fellow-travellers, both before and after these years must have stimulated the Party's socialism. Until 1920, the suffrage struggle had drawn the two groups together, and after 1924 several of Pankhurst's associates were active locally in both the Communist and Labour Parties. It was ex-WSF members who caused the Poplar Labour Party and trades council to be expelled from the national Party in 1927, for example; Jack O'Sullivan was a WSF activist early in the 1920s, and was the Communist secretary of Poplar trades council and borough Labour Party in the year of their expulsion.²⁰⁴

If the trade unions were on the right of Poplar Labour Party, the WSF between 1920 and 1924 was on its left; the fragmentation of class politics locally is becoming more evident. The next section pursues this theme of the

203. see for example the version of Pankhurst's politics presented in P.W. Romero, Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical (London, 1987), p.97.

204. THLHL, Poplar Left-Wing Group 1928 Guardian election handbill.

diversity of politics of class in its study of the local organisations of unemployed.

The National Unemployed Workers' Movement

The fourth left-wing group with an impact on Poplar's politics was the organisation for the unemployed. The first indication that Poplar's unemployed were organising themselves came in the winter of 1920. The post-war slump had begun to bite, and unemployment in Poplar was rising, as the table overleaf shows. Unemployment itself did not politicise Poplar workers however; initially they appealed for charitable donations which would be distributed to their most needy.²⁰⁵ It was the Labour Party which introduced them to the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM).²⁰⁸

The NUWM was an organisation run by Wal Hannington, a Communist shop steward who lost his job in 1919; Hannington knew George Lansbury well and Lansbury was enthusiastic about the NUWM, running a campaign in the national newspaper he edited to persuade the unemployed to GO TO THE GUARDIANS for relief.²⁰⁷ Lansbury did not believe responsibility for the support of the unemployed really lay with local authorities, for 'the problem of unemployment is a national, not to say an international problem; why then should the National Exchequer evade the cost of the maintenance of the unemployed man by placing the burden of upon the district where he happens to sleep?'²⁰⁸ But in order to force this injustice to breaking point, Poplar

205. East London Advertiser, 11.12.1920.

206. THLHL, Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance archive (hereafter PBMAA), letter to the Ministry of Health, 25.7.1923.

207. Daily Herald, December 1920; W. Hannington, Unemployed Struggles 1919-36: My Life and Struggles among the Unemployed (London, 1936).

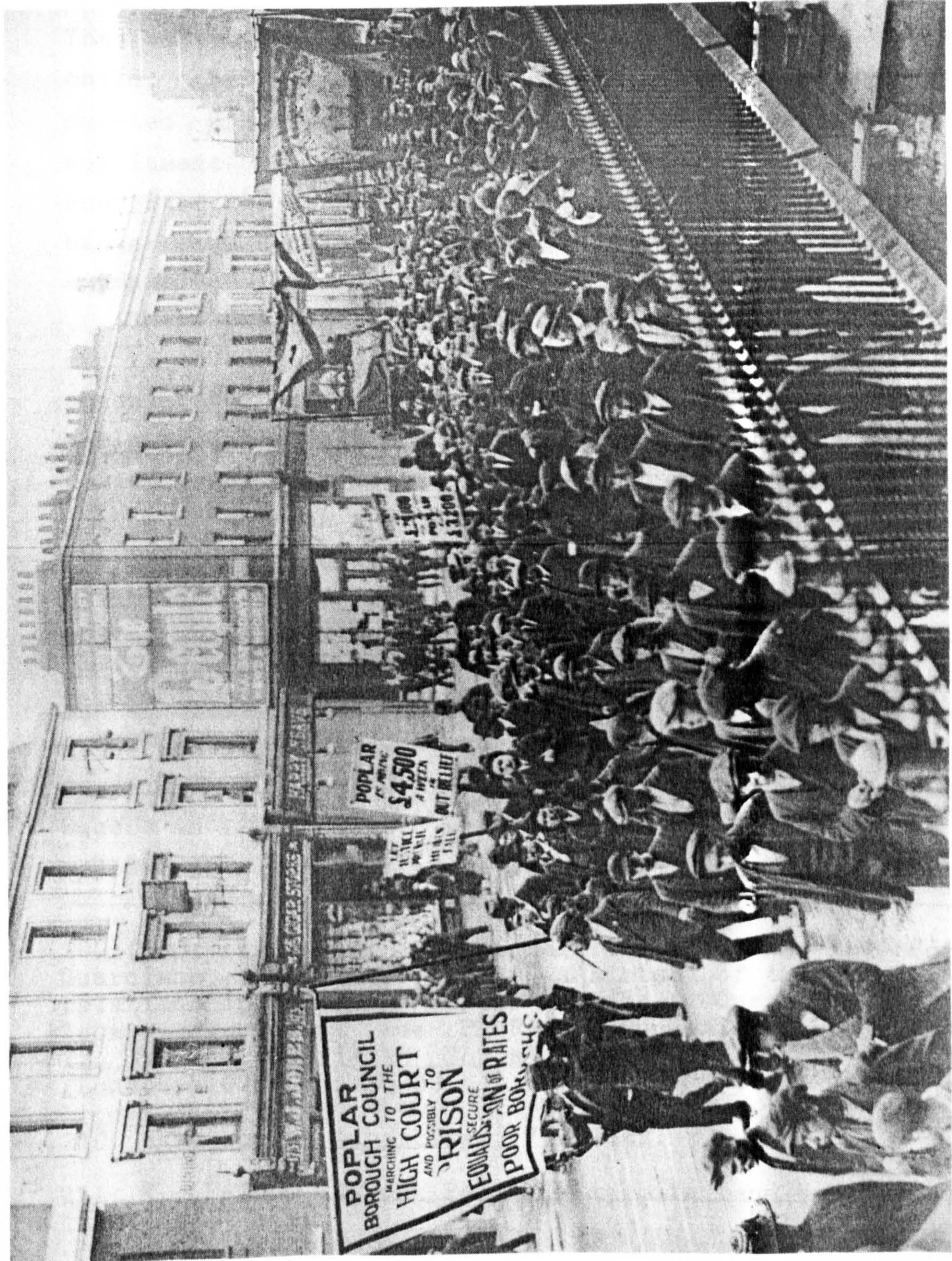
208. Labour Party Library, Labour Party Advisory Committee on Local Government, papers presented, Joint Research and Information Department of the Advisory Committee, 'The Able-Bodied Unemployed', memorandum 75 by G. Lansbury, June 1923, p.3.

TABLE 6
UNEMPLOYMENT IN POPLAR 1919-29

last week in	total receiving unemployment benefit
January 1920	1,898
June 1920	1,758
January 1921	8,073
June 1921	15,931
January 1922	10,887
June 1922	10,542
January 1923	10,358
June 1923	8,930
January 1924	8,770
June 1924	8,314
January 1925	8,971
June 1925	7,552
January 1926	8,063
June 1926	7,050
January 1927	7,523
June 1927	6,804
January 1928	6,287
June 1928	5,899
January 1929	6,374
June 1929	5,365

The total number receiving unemployment benefit excludes those whose entitlement to benefit had expired and those who were never entitled to it, such as domestic servants and railwaymen, both important groups in Poplar's labour force. These figures therefore underestimate the full extent of unemployment.

Source: PRO, LAB/92 and LAB/93.



A procession of jobless Poplar men, marching to Whitehall to protest at the level of unemployment, October 1920

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

Guardians urged their unemployed to come to them for relief.

The local unemployed took them at their word. In January 1922, a large deputation from the NUWM arrived at a Guardians' meeting and threatened to occupy the building unless the Guardians agreed to a higher level of relief. They wanted 36s. a week for a man and wife and 5s. for each child; the Guardians agreed.²⁰⁹ The unemployed thus exerted pressure on Poplar Labour Party, maintaining its commitment to statist welfare policies, and in return supported the Labour Party, carrying their organisation's banner in Minnie Lansbury's funeral procession for example.²¹⁰

There was some disagreement between Poplar Labour Party and the NUWM however, particularly over the use of farm colonies for unemployed men. In 1904 a wealthy American philanthropist called Joseph Fels had bought an estate at Hollesley Bay in Essex in order to give unemployed men a chance to work on the land. The estate was taken over by the Central (Unemployed) Body of London, an institution established by the 1905 Unemployed Workmen's Act to provide relief works for London's unemployed, as a labour colony, and it was still used as such in the 1920s.²¹¹ Lansbury was a close friend of Fels, and the Poplar Guardians sent more men to Hollesley Bay than any other Board of Guardians in London.²¹² At a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square in 1922 however, the NUWM described working at the colony as 'SLAVERY' of a more brutal character than even

209. PRO, MH68/214, Report of the Meeting of Poplar Guardians, 26.1.1922. For a history of the sympathetic relationship between Poplar's Labour Guardians and the local unemployed, see P. Ryan, 'Poplarism 1894-1930', in The Origins of British Social Policy, edited by P. Thane (London, 1978), pp.56-83.

210. East London Advertiser, 7.1.1922.

211. M. Fels, Joseph Fels: His Life and Work (London, 1920).

212. PRO, MH63/8, Distribution of Men at Hollesley Bay Colony, 25.9.1928

CHATTEL SLAVERY or SERFDOM',²¹³ and by late 1923 Poplar's Guardians were even more estranged from the local unemployed. In October of that year, the Guardians' premises were once more occupied by jobless men and women demanding higher scales of relief. Instead of acceding as they had done eighteen months earlier, the Guardians called in the police to evict them; this the police did, with considerable violence to the protesters.²¹⁴ The reason for this change of heart among Poplar's Guardians was that between the two occupations, many of the unemployed had shifted allegiance from the NUWM to the Unemployed Workers' Organisation (UWO), a body closely connected to Sylvia Pankhurst's left-wing communist group. The UWO demanded not just better treatment of the unemployed but 'the abolition of the present system of society and the creation of a "Workers' Industrial Republic"', and accused the NUWM of being too reformist;²¹⁵ in August 1923 the Bow branch of the UWO was gaining eighty members a week and the Poplar branch fifty.²¹⁶

The reason for Poplar Guardians' hostility to the UWO are various. Pacifists on the Board must have disliked the violence with which the UWO made its demands; there were suspicions that the leader of the UWO was a police spy;²¹⁷ and the Guardians were convinced too that if they pushed the Ministry of Health too far the consequences would be dire. As the local newspaper noted, the Guardians were caught between the devil of the Ministry of Health and the

213. PRO, MH63/8, letter from the Southwark branch of the NUWM, 31.8.1922.

214. East London Advertiser, 29.9.1923 and Workers' Dreadnought, 6.10.1923.

215. Workers' Dreadnought, 21.7.1923.

216. Workers' Dreadnought, 18.8.1923 and 25.8.1923.

217. Marx Memorial Library, National Unemployed Workers' Movement archive, Report of the Decisions Taken by the National Administrative Committee, 29 September-2 October 1923, p.1.

deep blue sea of the local unemployed.²¹⁸ It seems that this dilemma divided the unemployed in Poplar too; the NUWM revived in the area alongside the UWO.²¹⁹

Thus there were four organisations which contributed to Poplar Labour Party's class-based militancy in the 1920s through the involvement of councillors with them: the SDF, the ILP, the WSF and the NUWM. Like Poplar Labour Party, they believed in the state provision of welfare services and of unemployment relief, and in democracy and political education, and it was their specific arguments, based on a class analysis of the society they lived in, which shaped the class aspects of Poplar Labour Party's politics.

Conclusions

This chapter has tried to discover the source and nature of Poplar Labour Party's politics of class. It began by noting that structural accounts of 'the labour movement', on the basis of an abstract definition of class, weld together the political and industrial struggles of working people; and went on to argue that, since class is better conceptualised as a discursive rather than as a structural reality, it was necessary to elucidate its meaning in the political discourse of Poplar carefully and so to discover whether political and industrial action in a locality were united, rather than assume automatically that this was so.

It then turned to the workplace to begin this task. The General Strike was used as an example of co-operation between Poplar Labour Party and local workers which was rationalised by the Party in terms of class solidarity. But did workers share this language of class? Because of their articulacy, the trade unions were examined for clues as to the politics of Poplar's workers, but their sectionalism and the conflict between the Party and the unions in Poplar suggested that unions were not the source

218. East London Advertiser, 13.10.1923, and THLHL, Poplar Labour Party 1928 Guardian election handbill.

219. East London Advertiser, 27.9.1924; Workers' Dreadnought, 19.1.1924; THLHL, Poplar Left-Wing Group 1928 Guardian election handbill.

of the Party's class politics. The communist-led unofficial workers' organisations were then explored. They too were dismissed as the root of Poplar's radical socialism; they were weak in the borough and also relied on sensibilities other than class to prompt workers into action, sensibilities such as masculinity and anti-bureaucratism. Finally, the everyday resistance in workplaces was mentioned as a possible expression of class consciousness. But it was then argued that paid work was relatively unimportant in the lives of Poplar people. Women were more concerned with domestic matters, and welfare payments and the informal economy provided alternative incomes to many in Poplar; hence the organisational apathy of Poplar workers. Thus neither as an organised ideology nor as a pervasive cultural sensibility does class appear to have been important to Poplar's workers, and this conclusion clearly challenges the class-theoreticism of locality-studies.

It was suggested that workplace rebellion could be better explained in terms of Poplar people's communal sensibilities which were rooted in their domestic lives; the constraints of waged labour did not dominate life in Poplar. Recent critics of early locality-studies were thus corroborated; work is not always the sole source of politics.

The policies of Poplar Labour Party were then explored in some detail in order to clarify the nature of its politics, and two key aspects were identified: statist welfare and political education. Given the disjuncture which existed between the politics of Poplar's workplaces and those of its Labour Party, it was argued that the sources of the Party's detailed policies were also to be found in the arena of civil society outside the workplace. Four influences on the Party's class politics were outlined: the socialist SDF and ILP, with their statism and commitment to local autonomy and participation; the left-wing communist and feminist WSF, with its faith in the importance of women to the socialist project which also stressed statist welfare and democracy; and the communist NUWM, with its demands for higher relief rates. These

groups together with the Labour Party, created what Weller calls a 'rebel milieu': a localised matrix of personal and political relationships, a tangle of grassroots radicalism, contradictory and incoherent, but sustaining a militant local Labour Party.²²⁰

It can be seen then that, compared to Poplar's employers' universal support for the rate-payers' party in the borough, Poplar's class politics were chaotic.²²¹ Few trade unionists were socialists, and not all socialists shared Poplar Labour Party's brand of socialism. Class structure cannot predict political allegiance, despite claims to the contrary by certain locality-studies. Poplar's class politics were not a unified whole which inexorably led its population to a left-wing Labour Party; there were major political disjunctures within the locality. George Lansbury's claim that 'ours has been a class movement simply because only our class remains in Poplar' is the only way in which Poplar's politics can be seen as a unified movement;²²² only on the criterion of the residence of its participants can the different politics of Poplar Labour Party, local trade unions, the WSF, ILP and NUWM be reconciled into one movement.

Class politics then are not self-evident, and their complexity is compounded by the existence of other, non-class sensibilities which shape political action: gender, for example, in the case of the WSF. The rest of the thesis pursues the impact of sensibilities other than class on Poplar's politics in more detail, to insist on the complexity of political belief; and the next chapter explores one which, among other things, goes some way to explain the political discordance between Poplar Labour Party and the locality's workplace politics: citizenship.

220. K. Weller, Don't Be a Soldier! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-18 (London, 1985), p.6.

221. For a discussion of the ease with which capitalists decide their politics, see C. Offe and H. Wiesensthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organisational Form', Political Power and Social Theory, 1 (1980), 67-115.

222. G. Lansbury in Key, Red Poplar, p.3.

CHAPTER III

`THE CONQUEST OF EGO BY ALTRUISM':
DISCOURSES OF CITIZENSHIP IN 1920s POPLAR

Citizenship concerns the relationship between the individual and the community; it is a theory of the duties of the individual towards her community and of the reciprocal obligations of the community to the individual. It is an essentially political concept, since the role of the state as a representative of the community must be considered in any theorisation of citizenship.

Citizenship was a keyword in the political discourse of the 1920s. 'Keyword' is a term coined by Raymond Williams to refer to words connected to certain crucial and complex formations of meaning.¹ Keywords are 'significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought' (p.15); they imply a particular understanding of the world and can thus be seen as symbolising a whole communal sensibility. Thus loaded with implication and insinuation, their interpretation is disputed, uncertain and shifting. Certainly consensus on a single theory of citizenship has rarely been achieved. Competing interpretations of the rights and duties of the citizen, the community and the state have struggled for dominance in the past, and still do; citizenship is a contentious issue in current political debate, with both conservatives and socialists claiming versions of it as the basis of their politics.² In the 1920s too its meaning was a major source of political

1. R. Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, second edition (London, 1983).

2. for examples of this debate, see 'Citizen Hurd', New Statesman, 15.4.1988, p.3, and 'A Flawed Vision', p.3 and 'Citizenship in the Tory Democracy', p.14, New Statesman, 27.4.1988. Much of post-Marxist social theory tackles similar issues; for a review, see C. Pierson, 'New Theories of State and Civil Society: Recent Developments in Post-Marxist Analyses of the State', Sociology, 18 (1984), 563-571.

conflict. Both the left and the right drew upon aspects of its rhetoric.

With such a complex and contested idea, it is obviously necessary to be clear about its contours at the outset. This chapter therefore begins by exploring various British 'forms of thought' about citizenship from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s. Its main concern, however, is the way in which ideas about citizenship informed the activities of various groups in Poplar's civil society in the 1920s.

Williams argues that keywords are 'significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation' (p.15, my emphasis), and advocates of citizenship in the early twentieth century prided themselves on its practical consequences; as one of them said, 'not in wisdom merely, nor in potential capacity, but in actually living his life, is true well-being for a man to be found'.³ This stress on the implications of keywords for social action echoes the argument of Geertz that 'forms of thought', or, to use Geertz's terminology, communal sensibilities, only become meaningful through the social actions which embody them. It is only through a detailed local study that the practical results of citizenship or any other communal sensibility can be recovered. After its introduction to the meanings of citizenship therefore, the chapter turns to four groups in Poplar's civil society to which citizenship was an important idea: the political parties, social work centres, charities and trade unions. These diverse institutions all drew upon aspects of the discourse of citizenship and its arguments concerning the relationship between the individual and the community.

In its discussion of citizenship, this chapter pursues two criticisms already made of locality-studies. The first concerns the relative unimportance of the workplace to politics in Poplar; by showing that political debates pervaded many areas of local civil society in the 1920s, the chapter provides further evidence to contradict the impression given by many locality-studies that politics are

3. W.H. Fairbrother, The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, second edition (London, 1900), p.9.

confined to the workplace. Secondly, a study of the politics of citizenship shows how diverse are the bases of local politics. By exploring a politics based not on the relationship to the means of production, but on the relationship to the state, the class theoreticism of many locality-studies is challenged.

What then were the politics of citizenship?

The meanings of citizenship

The basis of citizenship as it was understood in the 1920s was the work of the Victorian philosopher Thomas Hill Green and his associates. This section therefore begins with an outline of their arguments and then explores the directions in which they were developed by later writers.

Pre-war theories of citizenship

Responsibility for reviving the idea of citizenship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lies with a group of idealist philosophers at Oxford, the foremost of which was Thomas Hill Green. Their main inspiration was Hegel and their theme was the relationship between the individual and her social life.

Following Hegel, these Idealists believed that the relation between individual and community was above all a religious and moral one. Each individual, they argued, was essentially good, for each contained within them a spark of God; the divine was immanent in the human. Specifically, the divine was represented in human life by rationality, a rationality which could overcome the base animal instincts of each person and was therefore seen by the Idealists as a moral force. They argued that the aim of each individual should be the cultivation of this morality, and that could be achieved by realising the higher, rational self within each person. Since humans are social beings, the Idealists maintained that this self-realisation could occur only through the community and communal life; they made little distinction between the individual and her society or between personal and public good. The community then was

the arena in which morality and goodness developed, and its secular institutions were 'the concrete body with which the Moral Ideal is to be clothed'.⁴

Political and social life is merely the concrete shape which Moral Ideals take when they are translated into actuality. Through civic institutions alone is it possible for the ideal of moral perfection to be realised by human beings.⁵

The institutions of a society were for the Idealists the expression of the will to be good common to all people; institutions represented common human rationality, will and purpose, and contributed to the common good.

The most important of these secular institutions was the state. 'The highest form of society, the most momentous in power for good and evil, man's greatest achievement, is the "Civilised Modern State"'.⁶ It was argued that the morality common to all people, the 'common universal', was 'most fully manifested in the state',⁷ and thus that state and its citizens were one.

The state is moral. Its builders are moral beings seeking a moral good; and in the course of constructing it they have made and are making themselves. Neither man nor society, neither citizen nor state, has priority over the other. They come into being in virtue of each other. They live in and through each other.⁸

This unity implied mutual obligations. The citizen had a duty to obey the state, since the state was moral; 'a good and wise state cannot have too much liberty or power or sovereignty'.⁹ Conversely, the state had a duty to be moral itself and to help its citizens to be so; 'the function, then, of Law and civic institutions is to help man realise his idea of self-perfection as a member of a

4. Fairbrother, The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, p.11.

5. Fairbrother, The Philosophy of Thoams Hill Green, p.110.

6. H. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship (London, 1919), p.12.

7. W.H. Hadow, Citizenship, (London, 1923), p.130.

8. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, p.29.

9. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, p.63.

social organisation in which each contributes to the better being of all the rest'.¹⁰

The Idealists did worry to some extent that this 'single life' of the citizen and the state could be seen as a limit to human freedom.¹¹ They quelled these doubts by defining freedom not as the ability to do whatever is desired; they felt that was a negative conceptualisation of liberty which involved merely the pursuit of selfish interests, propelled by immoral animal instincts. They preferred a positive notion of freedom, whereby individuals were free to develop themselves morally through the pursuit of the common good.

Herein lies man's freedom, man's responsibility. He is free, not as undetermined by motive, but in the fact that the motive lies in man himself.¹²

True freedom lay in contributing to the common weal; citizenship was the 'conquest of ego by altruism'.¹³

The free citizen then was one with the power to develop both their own and the state's morality; 'the real freeman is he who finds fulness of development in and through active civil life'.¹⁴ There were however certain preconditions necessary if this active life was to be possible: an adequate livelihood, good health, a sound family life, participation in political duties, religious faith and education.¹⁵ Some of these could and should be guaranteed by the state, since 'the function of the state is to secure and maintain for its citizens the conditions most favourable to the full exercise, and thereby the full development, of their best powers'.¹⁶ Vincent and Plant

10. Fairbrother, The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, p.114.

11. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, p.90.

12. Fairbrother, The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, p.71.

13. E.M. White, The Philosophy of Citizenship: An Introduction to Civics for Adults (London, 1921), p.33.

14. J. MacCunn, The Ethics of Citizenship, fourth edition, (Glasgow, 1907), p.45.

15. MacCunn, Ethics of Citizenship, pp.45-55.

16. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, p.138.

have argued that the spate of welfare legislation between 1905 and 1911 by a Liberal government were legitimated by the ideas of Green and his associates.¹⁷

This Liberal legislation -- establishing, among other things, old age pensions, unemployment benefit and free school meals -- was the beginning of the modern welfare state.¹⁸ However, Marshall has argued that it conceded only one element of the rights of citizenship.¹⁹ The welfare state concerned the social rights of citizenship, the right to a modicum of economic security and civilised life. Marshall suggests that there are two other aspects of citizenship: civil rights -- freedom of speech, freedom to hold property and the right to justice -- and the political right to participate in the exercise of power. The point made by Marshall is that the practical and political consequences of citizenship have been significant and extensive, and also radical, undermining the inequalities of class. In the words of Turner, 'citizenship is a consequence of real political and popular struggles against various forms of hierarchy, patriarchy, class exploitation and political oppression'.²⁰

Green was certainly no revolutionary. He defended private property, for example, as the basis of freedom, believing that its possession was a social right and encouraged responsible behaviour from its owner. But neither was he a diehard reactionary. In particular his belief in the potential of the state for good made him extremely critical of it when it failed to fulfill its proper role; he saw the emergence of the divine morality in the human community as a progressive process wherein

17. A. Vincent and R. Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists (Oxford, 1984).

18. For a history of these early welfare measures, see P. Thane, The Foundations of the Welfare State (London, 1982).

19. T.H. Marshall, Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays (Cambridge, 1950).

20. B.S. Turner, Citizenship and Capitalism: The Debate over Reformism (London, 1986), p.11.

contemporary shortcomings should always be rectified. Criticism of the state was thus both possible and desirable to Green, if only for the sake of a better state.²¹ There were limits too beyond which Green thought the state had no right to go; in particular he believed that a most basic right of the citizen was the right to life and that even in times of war the state had no permit to violate that right. To Green, war was not a moral act and states who fought were not fulfilling their true function as moral governments.²² Green then could be highly critical of the state.

This tension in the politics of Green's work made both radical and conservative interpretations of his ideas possible. The next sub-section explores the citizenship idea after the Great War.

Theories of citizenship after the First World War

In the development of Green's ideas by later writers, the potential for political radicalism gradually disappeared; criticism of the state became rarer and rarer. This process is examined here.

The emphasis of the literature on citizenship began to shift after the First World War towards stressing loyalty to the state and to the nation above all else. For example, two key texts -- by Fisher in 1924 and Jones in 1919 -- condemned the pacifism advocated by Green,²³ and a textbook of citizenship in 1919 exhorted its readers to 'vote only and always for the man who will serve these needs of the State best ... think of yourself last. The Nation must come first'.²⁴ In particular, loyalty to the

21. J.H. Muirhead, The Service of the State: Four Lectures on the Political Teaching of T.H. Green (London, 1908), pp.69-73; Fairbrother, The Philosophy of T.H. Green, p.142.

22. T.H. Green, The Works, II (London, 1890), pp.xxxvi-xxxviii.

23. H.A.L. Fisher, The Common Weal (London, 1924), p.131; Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, pp.72-73.

24. F.R. Worts, Citizenship: Its Meaning, Privileges and Duties (London, 1919), p.217.

community, the nation and the state was more and more often advocated as a replacement for loyalty to class. As Jones argued,

when [the worker] stands to his duties as a citizen and deals with the affairs of the state, he must forget the very notion of a class and, dealing with the rights of man as man, aim always at a good that is more universal than any class, the good of man as man. Then he can be trusted both with his own fate and with that of his country.²⁵

Jones was writing a textbook on citizenship for the troops in France in 1918, in the context of large-scale unrest among workers and soldiers at the end of the war; that is, there were certain historical contingencies which encouraged Jones's conservative interpretation of citizenship. This fact is important, for it suggests that citizenship was not an inherently conservative discourse.²⁶

As Hall and Schwarz persuasively argue in a study of the crises facing the British state between 1880 and 1930, in the early years of the 1920s the terms of citizenship remained open to negotiation.²⁷ Citizenship was then a language available to the left and the right for both radical and conservative ends, and this was possible because of the ambiguity of Green's views about property, freedom and the state. After the war, for example, ideas about citizenship could still justify large-scale welfare legislation; state subsidies were offered for maternity and child welfare clinics and for housing in 1919, for 'it is a truism that unhealthy housing and insanitary surroundings are unfavourable to the growth of strong and healthy

25. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, p.175.

26. for claims that it was, see S.S. Duncan and M. Goodwin, 'The Local State and Restructuring Social Relations: Theory and Practice', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 157-86 (p.164), and D. Sutton, 'Liberalism, State Collectivism and the Social Relations of Citizenship', in Crises in the British State 1880-1930, edited by M. Langan and B. Schwarz, (London, 1985), pp.63-79 (pp.76-77).

27. S. Hall and B. Schwarz, 'State and Society 1880-1930', in Crises in the British State 1880-1930, edited by Langan and Schwarz, pp.7-32 (p.28). See also Vincent and Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship, pp.31-32.

citizens'.²⁸ And in 1920 the national insurance scheme was extended to cover more workers.

Only after 1925 did the discourse of citizenship become part of the Conservative Party's philosophy, and Hall and Schwarz appear to be correct in seeing this development as part of the resolution of the much larger political crisis brought on by mass democracy which faced the state for the fifty years around the turn of the century.²⁹ If the hegemony of the ruling bloc was to survive, a newly-enfranchised electorate had to be integrated into the polity, and notions of the state/community and the rational and moral self-control necessary for the pursuit of the common good were successfully utilised to encourage that integration. As a lecturer on citizenship in 1927 argued,

no citizen can play an efficient part in the self-government of his country unless the part he so plays reflects a control acquired over himself -- a point that needs to be urgently pressed home in these days of enormous electorates and universal franchises. When this aspect of the matter is neglected, and it tends to be so, self-government turns into the tyranny of majorities -- a very different thing. And this in turn leads to 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', which is not a method of self-government at all, but a method of governing other people; to wit, the minority dictated to.³⁰

By the time of these lectures, the grand moral mission of the Victorian Idealists had been reduced to the aim of making the best of things as they are;³¹ as another writer put it, 'as citizens we are all public servants, ie. we all have to serve the state in our public capacity'.³² The

28. J.J. Clarke, The Housing Problem: Its History, Growth, Legislation and Procedure (London, 1920), p.vii. The post-war housing programme was based not only on the moral obligations of the state to its citizens, but also on fears of rebellion if the state failed in what was widely seen as its duty; see M. Swenarton, Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain (London, 1981).

29. Hall and Schwarz, 'State and Society'.

30. L.P. Jacks, Constructive Citizenship (London, 1927), p.100.

31. Jacks, Constructive Citizenship, p.45.

32. Worts, Citizenship, p.6.

critical possibilities of citizenship had been lost, and the common good and the community were terms used by conservatives in opposition to arguments for class loyalty.

This discussion has been concerned to stress the ambiguous politics of citizenship at the level of political ideas in the national arena, arguing that the conservative interpretation of citizenship was not inherent in the discourse but was the result of a specific historical contingency. The rest of the chapter turns now to Poplar and explores the conceptualisations of citizenship in that locality. One question it asks is whether the discourse developed in the same conservative manner there as it did nationally, and if not why not.

Citizenship and party politics in Poplar

In their discussions of the citizen's duties to the state, theorists of citizenship in the 1920s did not distinguish between the different levels of government, for the state in all its guises was seen as one.

There is, indeed, no real distinction between the purpose and function of local and central government, and therefore there ought to be no final hostility ... each consists of bodies of citizens ... The final purpose is the same: to make the nation as a whole a better place to live in than it would be if there were no governmental apparatus as a whole.³³

Thus it is no surprise to find that writers on local government were in no doubt that citizenship was as crucial to the proper functioning of local government as it was to central government.

Citizenship in local government took several forms. At the very least it involved a knowledge of the workings of local authorities and of the laws meant to bind them; 'every good citizen is bound to know something of those rules; they touch and concern his everyday life'.³⁴ Also essential for citizenship at the local level was the use of the right to vote. Voting was 'the supreme act of

33. H. Finer, English Local Government (London, 1933), p.6.

34. E. Jenks, An Outline of English Local Government, seventh edition (London, 1930), p.4.

citizenship',³⁵ because it bound the citizen to their local council by exercising reason and moral judgement in order to achieve the common good.³⁶ Finally, the citizen could become involved in the local state by standing for election to it. The role of the citizen thus bound local people to their local authority, and the council became an expression of the local community's will: 'an independent expression of popular views'.³⁷

This section explores the ideas of citizenship held by local political parties in Poplar. As will be shown, all the local parties believed that Poplar council and its Board of Guardians should represent the local community and its desires. Conflict arose however over what precisely the 'local community' was, and the section begins by examining how the local ratepayers' party understood community.

Citizenship and the ratepayers' party

The ratepayers' party in Poplar, the Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance (PBMA), was established in 1905 at the time of an inquiry by central government into the conduct of Poplar's Board of Guardians, which, through the efforts of its minority of Labour members, was even then pursuing a generous relief policy.³⁸ Although many small businesses and shopkeepers joined the PBMA, its most influential committee members were important local employers.³⁹ The issue which united them all was the rates levied by Poplar Borough Council. As Table 5 showed, rates were high in the borough and had to be so in order to finance the Labour

35. Worts, Citizenship, p.217.

36. J.J. Clarke, The Local Government of the United Kingdom, third edition (London, 1925), p.24.

37. Jenks, An Outline of English Local Government, p.8.

38. PBMAA, circular to Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance (hereafter PBMA) members, 21.9.1925.

39. PBMAA, letter to the members of a PBMA deputation to the Ministry of Health, 20.2.1922; PBMAA, List of Members in Bromley North-West Ward, 1915-30; East London Advertiser, 3.11.1928.

council's municipal services and relief. 'In the opinion of many fully qualified to judge,' thundered the PBMA in 1923, 'the financial wastage in respect of the present administration is enormous and is imposing such a burden on the Trade and Industry of the Distraint [sic] which is seriously affecting its future as an Industrial Centre'.⁴⁰ Throughout the 1920s it remained firmly opposed to the Labour Guardians' relief policies which it believed 'are having the effect of ruining the industrial life of a Borough which was once prosperous' by imposing a rates burden so large that it was driving local firms out of business.⁴¹

The PBMA understood this situation in terms provided by the citizenship discourse.

Poplar is a by-word among those who are engaged in the work of Local Government. It stands for extravagance. It denotes administration without conscious or comprehensive responsibility. It is the object lesson of a communal responsibility debased to class self-seeking.⁴²

In ignoring the common good, the great sin of Poplar's Labour council was to place the interests of a class above those of the community as a whole, and in 'the community' the PBMA included local ratepayers. It condemned 'the unconstitutional practices of the Poplar Board of Guardians in dispensing the ratepayers' money for the relief of the unemployed of this Borough, utterly regardless of the wishes of the large body of Ratepayers, whose protests are utterly ignored',⁴³ and it pursued several lines of counter-attack.

The first was to sponsor candidates in local elections, and the duties of citizenship were invoked to persuade the electorate to listen to the PBMA's arguments. 'The Choice before you is a serious one,' it told Poplar voters in 1925. 'To neglect the duty of voting is to abandon the

40. PBMAA, letter to the mayor of PMBC, 26.10.1923.

41. PBMA, The Breakdown of Local Government in Poplar (Bow, 1925), p.3.

42. PBMA, The Breakdown of Local Government, p.3.

43. PBMAA, petition to the Ministry of Health, 20.2.1922.

right and duty of citizenship'.⁴⁴ If elected, the PBMA promised to reduce the rates, which would lower local rents and encourage industry and employment in the borough.⁴⁵ The Alliance did have some success in Poplar's elections, especially in the better-off wards in the north of the borough, as the map overleaf shows.

But, just as the Labour Party did not rely on the automatic support of the working-class people in the borough, nor did the PBMA expect to win the hearts and minds of wealthy rate-paying voters without an effort; their propaganda campaign, which continued regardless of elections, was another element in their strategy to defeat Labour. Although in the early 1920s it was intimidated by 'the exceeding difficulty of any Public Meetings being held to represent the views of the overburdened Ratepayers and at which they could express their opinion' because of rowdy opposition from 'the organised Unemployed',⁴⁶ the PBMA persevered. It held public meetings; it established a branch of the anti-socialist Economic League in Poplar, which in 1928 held nearly five hundred open-air meetings which it estimated 67,000 people attended;⁴⁷ in the local elections of the same year, the PBMA distributed fifty thousand leaflets, one thousand posters and five hundred free newspapers;⁴⁸ Poplar Labour Party also claimed that the PBMA controlled the local press, which was certainly very hostile to Poplarism.⁴⁹ Clearly the ideas of the PBMA were well publicised, and were actively and sometimes heatedly debated at local meetings.⁵⁰

As well as this local activity, the PBMA lobbied the Ministry of Health. In February 1922 a deputation from the

44. THLHL, PBMA 1925 Guardian election handbill.

45. THLHL, PBMA 1928 council election handbill.

46. PBMAA, circular to PBMA members, 3.2.1922.

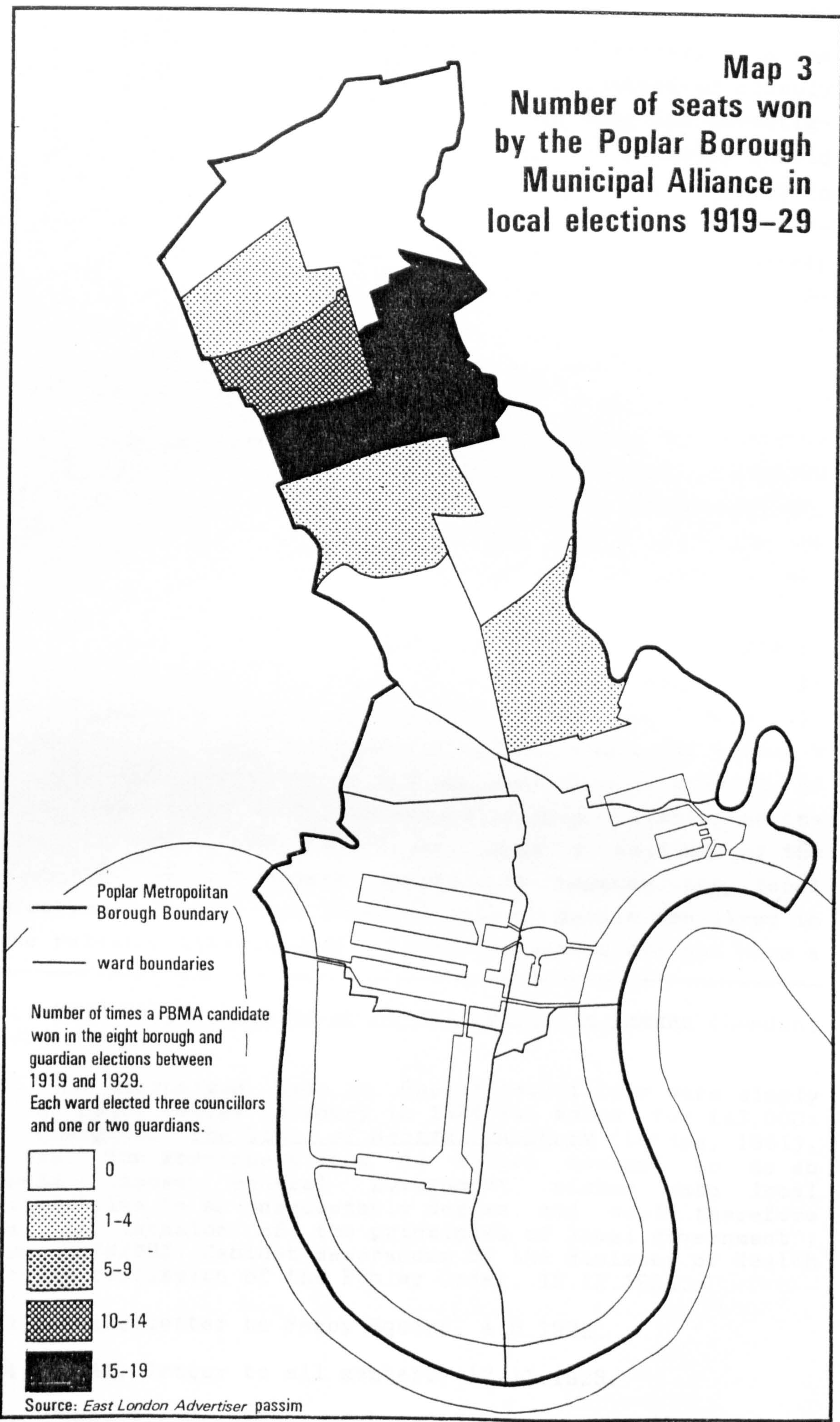
47. East London Advertiser, 9.2.1929.

48. PBMAA, executive committee, minutes of meetings, 6.11.1928.

49. PBMAA, letter from John Scurr to the PBMA, 1.11.1923.

50. East London Advertiser, 27.7.1929.

Map 3
Number of seats won
by the Poplar Borough
Municipal Alliance in
local elections 1919-29



**PAGE
NUMBERING
AS ORIGINAL**

Alliance persuaded the Ministry to hold an enquiry into the policies of Poplar Guardians, and it collaborated closely with the Ministry's inspector when he made his investigation.⁵¹ The PBMA also insisted that the Ministry should remove Poplar's Guardians from office for their refusal to pay the surcharges imposed upon them for their over-spending by the Ministry of Health, and it was not overly impressed with the Ministry's refusal to do so.⁵² 'We considered the Ministry the most invertebrate body of jelly fish administrators we had to deal with and ... in our opinion the present situation was largely due to the shilly-shallying policy or want of policy at the Ministry of Health'.⁵³ In 1923 its members threatened to withhold their rates in protest at the Ministry's ineffectuality, but was dissuaded by the Ministry itself and its own reluctance, as a body of law-abiding citizens, to act unconstitutionally.⁵⁴

The PBMA's greatest efforts went into its attempts to reform the franchise legislation. Like many of the conservative writers on citizenship in the late 1920s, the PBMA believed that 'representative government may become a tragedy and a farce at one and the same time if debased, as it is in Poplar, to the interests of only a section of the community'.⁵⁵ And in Poplar, only a section of the community of ratepayers could vote because the local election franchise was extended only to people who lived in the relevant constituency. Local businesses did not have a

51. PMBC, Guilty and Proud of it: Poplar's Answer (London, 1922), p.4.

52. The surcharges made on Poplar councillors were simply never paid; George Lansbury in 1926 was asked for £43,000: R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London, 1951), p.225. The government took no action because to do so would impose central government wishes onto local authorities to an unacceptable degree, and would therefore be 'an invasion of the principles of local government'; PRO, MH79/305, Cabinet memorandum by the Minister of Health on the rescission of the Poplar Order, 18.12.1924.

53. PBMAA, letter to Percy Squire, 4.8.1922.

54. PBMAA, letter to all members, 12.11.1923.

55. PBMA, The Breakdown of Local Government, p.13.

vote. They were however liable to pay rates to fund local government, as the PBMA knew only too well; in 1923, it calculated that of Poplar's rateable assessment of £932,704, £530,000 was paid by the docks and other large industrial enterprises which could not vote in local elections.⁵⁶ To remedy this state of affairs 'at absolute variance with the principle of "No Taxation without Representation"',⁵⁷ the PBMA proposed firstly, that large ratepayers should have votes in proportion to their assessments, secondly, that large ratepayers should be able to vote as individuals whether locally resident or not, thirdly, that the law concerning local government and rating should be simplified, and finally that people in receipt of relief should be disenfranchised.⁵⁸ This latter demand was a direct result of another aspect of the 1920s conservative interpretation of citizenship, but it will be explored in more detail in the next section. All these proposals were made to the Ministry of Health by the PBMA and by the National Union of Manufacturers to which several large Poplar firms belonged.⁵⁹

The demand that the right to vote should be withdrawn from people in receipt of relief was so extreme that the government, despite its intense dislike of Poplarism, did not dare to accede.⁶⁰ Why was the PBMA so militant? No doubt its direct experience of the policies of Poplar Labour Party and the absolute refusal of the Party to listen to the PBMA contributed to its extremism. John Scurr wrote superbly sarcastic letter to the PBMA in 1923:

I quite recognise that many members of your association feel very keenly being no longer sitting in the seat of power. I quite appreciate

56. PBMAA, letter to Ministry of Health, 2.10.1923.

57. PBMAA, circular to PBMA members, March 1923.

58. PBMAA, letter from F.W. Woolley, 4.5.1925.

59. PRO, HLG52/119; National Union of Manufacturers, Descriptive and Classified Directory of Members (London, 1925).

60. A. Deacon and E. Briggs, 'Local Democracy and Central Policy: The Issue of Pauper Votes in the 1920s', Policy and Politics, 2 (1973), 347-64.

that employers of labour and their salaried servants resent the fact that mere workmen should govern this Borough ... you regard it as the end of all things.⁶¹

In its frustration at the local situation, the PBMA drew the most conservative conclusions possible from the logic of citizenship.

The PBMA, then, saw community as a unity of all people associated with a locality, whether they were employers or workers; its idea of community was in direct opposition to the idea of class. Indeed the PBMA claimed that in its concern for the community as a whole, 'the Alliance had no politics',⁶² and others in Poplar shared this view of community. Clara Grant, for example, ran a popular settlement based around Fern Street School in Bow and was convinced 'that, in local elections, party machinery would be unnecessary if only each area could rear enough residents who knew and cared for their neighbours, and who had some insight and vision where the larger issues of civic life are concerned'.⁶³ (Civics was a term associated with practical citizenship.)

Another group in Poplar certain of the need for community as opposed to class was the ex-servicemen's organisation. Like the PBMA, ex-servicemen were concerned to stress the negation of class differences by the community spirit; as the president of the Bow, Bromley and Old Ford branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS) said, in the trenches no-one had bothered about the divisions of class. In a speech in 1918, he suggested that ex-servicemen 'would have to prepare themselves for altogether new social arrangements, a better order of things all round, and the total abolition of the old class distinctions', a sentiment warmly received by the three hundred branch members present.⁶⁴ That NFDDSS president in 1918 was also the

61. PBMAA, letter from J. Scurr, 1.11.1923.

62. PBMAA, executive committee, minutes of meetings, 11.2.1929.

63. C. Grant, Earthing Bundles (Bow, 1930), p.130.

64. East London Advertiser, 25.1.1918.

president of the PBMA, Sir Alfred Warren, and the popularity of his views is shown by the continued insistence of the local NFDDSS (which became the British Legion in 1921) that they met in good fellowship and were therefore opposed to party politics.⁶⁵

The NFDDSS were not wholly apolitical however. In particular, they demanded that the state provide adequate war pensions and disability allowances for ex-servicemen; drawing upon the idea of mutual obligations between the state and citizen, they argued that since they had served the state in war when asked, the state now had an obligation to help them.⁶⁶ When unemployment began to rise in 1920 they claimed the government should provide employment for ex-soldiers and sailors without jobs, and the NFDDSS was prominent in marches in protest at unemployment in Poplar.⁶⁷ The PBMA supported them in these demands. It too felt that the state had certain obligations to the men who had served it so valiantly, and in his speech to the Bow, Bromley and Old Ford branch of the NFDDSS in 1918, Warren noted that 'their clubs should be of great value to them as a means of securing proper and generous treatment from those in authority; and he was quite sure that many of them felt that there were certain things in regard to pensions and allowances which ought to be righted (hear, hear)'.⁶⁸ The PBMA also agreed with the demands of the unemployed ex-servicemen; 'we recognise the principle that every person who wishes for work but cannot get it must be supported until such times as work becomes

65. East End News, 30.12.1919, 5.12.1924. There was also a secret organisation called the Fellowship of the Services, which apparently began in Poplar in 1923 and was pledged to 'assert the bond between man and man and officer and man against the opposing doctrine of the class war which would set comrades against each other to serve the purposes of non-Service politicians'; Evening News, 20.8.1935.

66. see S.R. Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen 1918-20', Historical Journal, 16 (1973), 179-88; G. Wootton, The Official History of the British Legion (London, 1956).

67. East End News, 19.10.1920.

68. East End News, 25.1.1918.

available'.⁶⁹ Moreover, it felt that provision for the unemployed was the responsibility of the central state; if the state would only undertake its proper duties, the problems of local government in Poplar, caused by the need to support large numbers of the unemployed on the rates, would be halved.⁷⁰

These demands made by ex-servicemen on the state meant that the Labour Party as well as the PBMA was sympathetic to their cause; statism was a central strategy of the Labour Party in Poplar, as the previous chapter noted.⁷¹ Labour Party agent Joe Banks and Labour councillor and Guardian Sam March were present at NFDDSS meetings and supported the Federation in its efforts to win the pensions and other benefits owed to them by the government,⁷² and the NFDDSS was the ex-servicemen's organisation most closely associated with the Labour Party.

The PBMA and Poplar Labour Party both argued that ex-servicemen had a right to help from the state then, but about many other aspects of citizenship they disagreed. The ex-servicemen thus illustrate the political ambiguity of the citizenship discourse; they were virtually the only point of overlap between the very different interpretations of citizenship held by the Labour Party and the PBMA. This chapter now turns to the Labour Party's understanding of that term.

69. THLHL, PBMA 1925 Guardian election handbill.

70. PBMAA, petition to the Ministry of Health, 20.2.1922. The Conservative candidate for Bow and Bromley in the 1924 General Election agreed, saying that 'the causes of unemployment were national and the burden of meeting it ought logically to be national too'; PRO, MH57/147, deputation of Conservative candidates from the East End of London, 31.5.1927.

71. The statism of the national Labour Party has been attributed in part to the Idealists; see J. Clarke, A. Cochrane and C. Smart, Ideologies of Welfare: From Dreams to Disillusion (London, 1987), pp.47-48. Fabianism was of course the other main source of the national Labour Party's statism.

72. East End News, 25.1.1918 and 23.5.1924.

Poplar Labour Party and citizenship

Poplar Labour Party drew upon aspects of the citizenship discourse to legitimate its radicalism. This sub-section explores those aspects and, like the previous sub-section which suggested that the extremism of the PBMA was a result of its experience of the militant local Labour Party, offers some explanations for these local interpretations of citizenship.

One element of Poplar Labour Party's radicalism was its pacifism, which was justified in terms of citizenship by a Labour Party activist and ardent pacifist, Muriel Lester. Muriel Lester ran a settlement called Kingsley Hall in Bow; she was a close associate of George Lansbury and was made a Labour alderman in 1922 after the death of Minnie Lansbury.⁷³ Her politics were inspired by her Christianity, as chapter V will discuss in more detail, but her translation of her faith into practical politics depended, as it did to Thomas Hill Green, on the notion citizenship. Like Green, she saw the basis of rationality and truth in the word of God, and felt that prayer helped a citizen to make the right decisions.⁷⁴ But to Lester, the duties of Christian citizens were not decreed by the needs of the secular state, as contemporary conservative accounts of citizenship were arguing, but by the laws of God's kingdom.⁷⁵ This might well involve illegal activity and undergoing brutal punishment, as pacifists during the Great War discovered; but Muriel Lester was convinced that 'to make a fellow-man kill another seemed ... something akin to enforced prostitution, a violation of personality such as would be found eventually to impoverish the quality of citizenship and to destroy the values of life'.⁷⁶ Her rejection of the state went even further than this; in her commitment to non-violence she realised that 'the less

73. East London Advertiser, 2.9.1922.

74. M. Lester and A. Pullen, Shall I Pull My Weight? Christian Citizenship for Youth (London, 1936), p.10.

75. Lester and Pullen, Shall I Pull My Weight?, p.26.

76. M. Lester, Kill or Cure? (Nashville, 1937), p.36.

[she] owned, the less [she was] dependent on the potential violence of the police force, behind which is always ranged the power of the military in case of need',⁷⁷ and she lived a life of ascetic poverty in Kingsley Hall. The local strength of Christianity thus explains Lester's radical vision of citizenship.

More important to Poplar Labour Party's radicalism, however, was its belief that local government was accountable only to local voters. There were in fact several strands in its understanding of the bond between the local community and its council. As the previous chapter explained, it believed they were united by their class, and the next chapter will discuss its belief that both Party and voters shared the same values of working-class life. But Poplar Labour Party also felt party and people were bound together through local citizenship; its definition of community involved citizenship as well as class and values. As citizens, Poplar residents voted, and the council and Guardians thus expressed local will and opinion just as theorists of citizenship in local government said they should. Poplar Labour Party certainly had an overwhelming hold on the electorate of the borough, winning 69.6 per cent of the votes in council elections and 72.7 per cent of the Guardian election votes between 1919 and 1928,⁷⁸ and the closeness of this connection between Labour and its voters was used time and time again by the Party to defend its policies. George Lansbury believed that the endorsement of Labour policies by voters was their highest accolade,⁷⁹ and when the Ministry of Health surcharged two councillors the cost of transporting the Guardians' school band to gaol in 1921 to play for the imprisoned councillors, their defence was that 'the approval of the inhabitants of the district to their action

77. Lester, Kill or Cure?, p.69.

78. Percentages calculated from the election results given in the East London Advertiser.

79. G. Lansbury, My Life (London, 1928), p.166 and 'Poplar and the Labour Party: A Defence of Poplarism', Labour Monthly, 2 (1922), 383-91, (p.383).

was undoubted and enthusiastic'.⁸⁰ To PBMA accusations of unfairness and inefficiency in the Labour council, the Labour mayor John Scurr could simply reply that the policies of the Labour Party had been placed before the electorate and overwhelmingly endorsed; his conclusion was that the PBMA should 'recognise that Poplar has rejected you and your works'.⁸¹

The implication of Scurr's reply was that the voting electorate was Poplar. People who lived elsewhere, and who therefore could not vote in local elections, were outsiders; the scorn heaped upon the members of the PBMA, many of whose members lived in the leafy suburbs of north east or south east London, and 'who in actual fact would not be found dead in Poplar except for the purpose of making money' has already been noted.⁸² The franchise, then, the legal definition of citizenship and its geography at the local level, was important to Poplar Labour Party; it reinforced their condemnation of class enemies by prioritising local residence and thus rejected capitalists twice over, as middle-class and as outsiders unable to vote. The previous chapter looked at the strong arguments for local democracy of the ILP and WSF, and it is their influence on Poplar Labour Party which must account for the Party's radical interpretation of the citizenship discourse.

For radical it was. Its interpretation of the obligations of citizenship bolstered Poplar council's defiance of central government. This defiance has been mentioned already in the context of Poplarism; but that episode in 1921 was just the tip of the iceberg of Poplar's resistance to 'hostile ... dictatorial' control by outsiders.⁸³ The main technique used by Poplar's Labour

80. PRO, MH68/234, letter from the Poplar Board of Guardians to the Ministry of Health, 28.12.1922.

81. PBMAA, letter from John Scurr, 1.11.1923.

82. THLHL, Poplar Labour Party 1922 council election handbill.

83. PBMAA, statement made by the chair of Poplar Guardians to the Ministry of Health, 20.6.1922.

council to evade control by central government was simply not to implement the Ministry's requests. The council refused to charge the rents asked for by the Ministry of Health as a condition of its grants towards the costs of building council houses and when the Ministry insisted, Poplar took it to the Rent Tribunal where the verdict was substantially in its favour.⁸⁴ The Ministry disliked Poplar's policy of employing only trade union members, but knew that it would be impossible to force Poplar to change its policy because its selection criteria could never be proved.⁸⁵ When a Poplar Relieving Officer was elected as South Poplar's London County Council representative in 1925, the Ministry of Health was worried that he might have bought his votes by giving relief too generously and wanted to ask the council to remove him to a post not concerned with relief distribution; but the chair of Poplar Board of Guardians managed to avoid the Ministry's phone calls for three months and in 1928 the same man was again elected to the London County Council.⁸⁶ In 1922, after a survey of the few metropolitan boroughs to give free milk to needy mothers and children (which included Poplar), the Ministry admitted that cutbacks would be impossible to enforce because of the very strong local commitments to the service.⁸⁷ Poplar's Board of Guardians refused to treat the hunger marchers of 1923 as casuals, as the Ministry wanted.⁸⁸ Poplar council refused to comply with the conditions attached to grants for relief works from the Unemployment Grants Committee concerning the number of ex-servicemen and unskilled men to be employed on the works,

84. THLHL, PMBC, Special Housing Committee, minutes of meetings, 18.9.1922.

85. PRO, HLG51/68, minute 10.3.1927.

86. PRO, HLG51/71, memorandum, 26.3.1925 and minute, 4.6.1925.

87. PRO, MH55/277, minute 13.2.1922.

88. PRO, MH57/105, minute 2.1.1923.

and won their case.⁸⁹ All these instances of defiance were legitimated by Poplar Labour Party on the basis of the local electorate's support for the Party; the Party defended itself in 1922, for example, by noting that 'it has been quite clearly proved that the workers themselves support the Poplar policy whenever it is explained to them'.⁹⁰ The duty of the local state to obey its citizens legitimated the Party's resistance to central government control.

The nature of this radicalism must be further examined however, for it reveals an aspect of Poplar Labour Party rarely acknowledged in accounts of Poplarism: its reformism. From the description above of Poplar Labour Party's defiance of central government, it can be seen that the outright law-breaking of the Poplarism episode was in fact atypical of the Party's tactics. It pushed the law to its limits but almost always refused to break it; its preferred strategy was to search for a loophole in the law and then exploit it to the full, as the Ministry of Health recognised in frustration.⁹¹ After the Health Minister published his recommended scale of relief in 1921, Poplar council decided quite legally to pay a higher scale and fund the extra from its own rates. When, as a result of the criticisms of the resulting high rates, he issued the 'Poplar Order' in the spring of 1922 which made relief above the recommended levels illegal except in emergency cases, Poplar's Guardians simply notified the Ministry of about two thousand 'emergencies' a week, far too many to be checked for authenticity.⁹² And as has already been noted, although the Ministry disliked the council's method of debt-financing it could do nothing to stop it since it was wholly within the law.

89. PRO, LAB4/1, Unemployment Grants Committee minutes, 28.1.1921 and LAB4/3, Unemployment Grants Committee minutes, 8.1.1923.

90. Lansbury, 'Poplar and the Labour Party', p.383.

91. PRO, MH57/94, 'The Effect Upon the Poor Law System of the General Strike and Coal Dispute of 1926', unpaginated.

92. B. Keith-Lucas, 'Poplarism', Public Law, 7 (1962), 52-80 (p.67).

Despite their imprisonment then, Poplar Labour Party believed in reformist change from within the existing system rather than in its violent revolutionary overthrow. Its members' faith in democracy led to a commitment to revolution through the ballot box, and in this way the logic of citizenship shaped the Party's radicalism decisively. George Lansbury, Poplar's most articulate and influential politician until the later 1920s, advocated peaceful and democratic reform, arguing like T.H. Green that only through the development of each person's individual morality could effective social change occur.⁹³ This constitutionalism is symbolised in the council's desire in 1921 to present a letter to the King when he came to open an extension to the Regent's Canal in Poplar, protesting at unemployment and asking him for remedial measures; republicanism was never popular in Poplar.⁹⁴ Poplar Labour Party's moderacy of method also helps to explain its involvement with Poplar's ex-servicemen. The reformist nature of the NFDDSS has been noted; the vast majority of ex-servicemen were loyal 'citizen soldiers',⁹⁵ and thus won the support of the constitutionalist Labour Party in Poplar.

Thus the discourse of citizenship was central to both the major political parties in Poplar, but their interpretations of its meaning were clearly diverse, influenced by the local circumstances of each party. The discourse enabled divisions of opinion over who was entitled to control Poplar council, local residents only or the owners of local businesses too; it supported the anti-

93. G. Lansbury, These Things Shall Be (London, 1920), p.21, and 'Why Pacifists Should be Socialists', Fact 7 (1937), 5-74 (p.36).

94. East London Advertiser, 9.7.1921. The letter was never presented because two of Poplar's Communist councillors objected to its polite language and George Lansbury wanted absolute unanimity among the councillors if a letter was to be sent in their name. For Poplar's love of royalty, see the huge crowds in photographs of royal visits to Poplar, and the size and elaborateness of the Coronation street parties in 1937, in the photograph collection, THLHL.

95. Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen', p.183.

statism of Muriel Lester as well as the enthusiasm of the PBMA for the control of local government by the Ministry of Health; it allowed ex-servicemen to make demands on the state and yet remain loyal to it. Yet as well as conflict it gave rise to consensus; on the need for central state intervention to help the unemployed the Labour Party and the PBMA were one. They also shared a reformism; neither broke the law as an everyday policy, and to judge Poplar's radicalism on the basis of the events of 1921 alone is to misunderstand its politics. These shared politics deny the accuracy of accounts which portray Labour and ratepayers as unequivocal enemies because of their structural class positions.⁹⁶ The influence on Poplar Labour Party of the discourse of citizenship challenges class theoretical studies in another way too, by demonstrating that local politics are rather more complex than class-theoretical accounts can admit. Politics in Poplar involved more than class-based arguments.

These ideas about citizenship were debated and publicised in Poplar; there was a choice of politics in the locality. The chapter now turns away from the formal politics of political parties and towards another arena of civil society which offered political choices: Poplar's charities.

Citizenship and philanthropy in Poplar

If the political parties in Poplar agreed on the desirability of state intervention to remedy social problems, local charities were not so convinced. By the 1920s the statism shared by the PBMA and Poplar Labour Party had extended into the arena of charitable and philanthropic organisations in Poplar,⁹⁷ particularly in

96. The socialism of local Labour Parties is unproblematically contrasted with the citizenship of ratepayer parties in, for example, Duncan and Goodwin, 'The Local State and Restructuring Social Relations'.

97. This was a general development; see E. MacAdam, The New Philanthropy: A Study of the Relations Between the Statutory and Voluntary Social Services (London, 1934).

the field of health care,⁹⁸ but it had not done so without debate, debate often phrased in the terms of the citizenship discourses. This section will explore that conflict, and it begins by describing the character of charitable effort in Poplar in order to stress its prominence in local civil society.

Charitable activity in Poplar

Most charities in Poplar had little to do with the local state, and were organised in the 1920s much as they had been for years before. There were charitable trusts in local parishes, often very small and dating from seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; most had been reorganised by the Charity Commissioners in the late nineteenth century. The eleven trusts of the Bromley Parochial Charities were run as one, for example, and in 1919 they gave ten shillings to each of ten poor widows, seven shillings to eighteen poor persons and distributed 108 shilling coal tickets. By 1924 they were giving over a thousand coal tickets to the poor of the borough.⁹⁹ Charitable societies in Poplar were much larger in terms of scope and funding than these trusts, however, and it is on them that attention will focus here. They can be divided into two types.

The first kind of charitable society raised money in order to help the poor and needy directly. The Limehouse Philanthropic Society for example was established in 1837 to aid the poor of Poplar and neighbouring Limehouse and Shadwell; in 1922 it had an income of £334 and helped four hundred people by dispensing pensions and cash to those in

98. The charitable foundation of the Royal College of St Katherine ran three of Poplar's seven maternity and child welfare clinics and a representative of the College sat on the relevant council committee, for example, and other local charities were paid by the council for their services; PMBC, General Information and Hints for the Expectant Mother and the Management of Infants (London, 1927), pp.2-3.

99. THLHL, Bromley St. Leonard's Ecclesiastical and Parochial Charities, Notices of Meetings and Accounts, 1919 and 1924.

need.¹⁰⁰ The Poplar Benevolent and Accident Relief Society (PBARS) gave away six thousand shilling relief tickets each year; its average annual income in the 1920s was about £1,200.¹⁰¹ One of the largest charities in Poplar was the Poplar Children's Carnival Fund; the carnival was an annual event which aimed to raise the funds necessary to give all of the children in Poplar borough a New Year's party with cakes and gifts, a treat which very few would otherwise enjoy. In 1924 twenty eight thousand children were entertained, and the annual event remains in the memory of those who participated even today.¹⁰² Poplar also had a branch of the Save the Children Fund which was established in 1919 to help the children starving in Europe in the aftermath of the Great War.¹⁰³ Health care was another area of charitable activity. The East London Nursing Society (ELNS) was a charity employing nurses to visit the sick poor; each of its twenty or so nurses made about four thousand visits in a year,¹⁰⁴ and there were also health services offered by certain religious houses in the borough.¹⁰⁵ Finally, there were charities involved in rescue work. The Poplar Association for Befriending Girls (PABG) dealt with about eighty women annually;¹⁰⁶ also in Poplar were the Red Lamp Refuge and the Poplar Workhouse

100. Annual Charities Register and Digest: Being a Classified Register of Charities in or Available to the Metropolis (London, 1925).

101. East London Advertiser, 1.3.1929; THLHL, Poplar Benevolent and Accident Relief Society, Annual Report, 6 vols (Poplar, 1923-29).

102. East London Advertiser, 5.1.1924. Several of my interviewees recalled the party; there is some controversy about the acceptability marzipan fish which was given to each child.

103. East London Advertiser, 25.9.1920.

104. THLHL, East London Nursing Society, Annual Report, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29).

105. These were the Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine and the Little Sisters of the Assumption; Annual Charities Register and Digest 1919 (London, 1919).

106. THLHL, Poplar Association for Befriending Girls, Annual Report, 6 vols (Poplar, 1925-29).

Girls' Aid Committee, the aim of the latter being to help young women 'who have forfeited their character' by becoming unmarried mothers.¹⁰⁷

The second type of charitable society in Poplar was those societies which raised money to give to other charities. These included the Bow and Bromley Philanthropic Aid Society, which in 1923 had 240 members and raised £500 for charity,¹⁰⁸ the Loyal and United Friends Social and Benevolent Committee of Bow, the Poplar Great Fete Day Committee, which organised an annual summer fete in Poplar Recreation Ground, and the Pride of Poplar Philanthropic Aid Society.¹⁰⁹ The largest fundraiser however was the Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund. The Fund was established in order to help finance hospitals in London by organising workplace collections, and from 1918 to 1921 Poplar collected more than any other local committee; in 1921 its grand total was £1,219.¹¹⁰ Over half of this money went to the Poplar Hospital for Accidents on East India Dock Road; this was another major Poplar charity, which dealt with 1,500 in-patients and 43,000 out-patients each year.¹¹¹

Poplar's charities were funded in part by local working-class people; local collections at workplaces and at fetes and carnivals produced funds, as did fees charged by some charities for their services. In 1920, Poplar Hospital began charging 2s.6d. a day to in-patients who could afford to pay,¹¹² and the nurses of the ELNS asked for what their patients could offer and generally received about tuppence ha'penny each visit.¹¹³ Other charities

107. Annual Charities Register and Digest 1919.

108. East London Advertiser, 13.10.1923.

109. East London Advertiser, 14.2.1925, 4.10.1923 and 3.7.1926; THLHL, Poplar Great Fete Day Committee of Management, Fete Programmes (Poplar, 1916-18, 1920).

110. THLHL, Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund, Annual Report 1922 (Poplar, 1922), p.2.

111. THLHL, Poplar Hospital for Accidents, Annual Report, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29).

112. East London Advertiser, 21.8.1920.

113. East London Nursing Society, Annual Report.

received some income from Poplar council or from the Ministry of Health. Much more important in monetary terms however were donations from wealthy individuals and companies. Poplar Hospital survived on donations made by shipping and dock companies; in 1928 only 14.9 per cent of its ordinary income came from its patients compared to an average among London hospitals of 28.3 per cent.¹¹⁴ Poplar's Great Fete depended on the generosity of local firms donating their produce free for the fete to sell, and Poplar Tuberculosis Care Committee also relied on gifts from businesses for their annual fund-raising jumble sale.¹¹⁵ The ELNS, PABG and PBARS all relied on voluntary donations for their survival, and given the poverty of most of Poplar's working-class residents, most donations must have come from bourgeois sources.

The financial dominance of the middle-class in charitable effort in Poplar was reflected in the people active in the charities. The members of the PBARS were mostly shopkeepers and local businessmen,¹¹⁶ for example, and to give but three examples of many individual cases of bourgeois philanthropic activity, George Paton was the managing director of Bryant and May's match factory in Bow and was for many years president of the Poplar Children's Carnival Fund and in 1921 he helped to organise a concert to raise money for the unemployed;¹¹⁷ Thomas Miller-Jones owned a chemicals factory and was president in 1923 of the Loyal and United Friends Social and Benevolent Society and in 1928 of the Tower Hamlets Philanthropic Society;¹¹⁸ and

114. GLRO, King Edward's Hospital Fund archive: A/KE/254/8, letter from Poplar Hospital for Accidents, 5.10.1925; and Reports of the Visitors Appointed to Visit the Hospitals Applying for Grants from the Fund in 1929: Statistical Summary for 1928, pp.16-17.

115. Poplar Great Fete Day Committee of Management, Programme; THLHL, Poplar Tuberculosis Care Committee, Annual Report 1932 (Poplar, 1932).

116. There was a large overlap between members of the Society and members of Poplar Chamber of Commerce; East London Advertiser, 4.5.1929.

117. East London Advertiser, 26.3.1921.

118. East London Advertiser, 24.3.1928.

Alfred Brandy owned a jewellery shop and was active in the Poplar Hospital Saturday Fund and the PBARS.¹¹⁹

Charities then were a prominent part of Poplar's civil society, organising events and funding services used by large numbers of Poplar people. Their underlying ideas, and the way in which they were related to the citizenship debate, will be examined next, beginning with the motivations of individual fund-raisers.

The citizenship of charity

The motivations of many philanthropists in the 1920s can be connected to the duty of a good citizen to serve their community. Philanthropy was part of the ideal citizen's effort to achieve the common good by providing services otherwise unavailable to the poor.

It is the demand that their existence as members of society, and as members of a particular part of that society, makes on all men and women. It is essentially the duty of citizenship not only to the city and the State but to the world.¹²⁰

The urge to be a good citizen can certainly be detected among Poplar's philanthropists. Richard Green was the owner of several ship-repairing yards in east London, and was involved in the Poplar Hospital Saturday Fund as well as sitting on the General Committee of Poplar Hospital; he explained his motivations in a letter to George Lansbury:

I am sometimes overwhelmed by my sense of responsibility ... believe me though as you know I am one of the 'benevolent autocratic order' I have always tried to hold my position as a trust for those about me, so shaping any cause that I may help the eventual attainment of much that you hold dear ... there is a better world to be had ... it is my duty to render all the help I can, and place what little experience I have gained and what can be useful at the service of my fellows.¹²¹

The language of 'responsibility', 'a better world' and of 'duty' was that of the good citizen working to improve the

119. Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund, Annual Report 1922; Poplar Benevolent and Accident Relief Society, Annual Report 1925.

120. C.R. Attlee, The Social Worker (London, 1920), p.2.

121. GLP, vol 7, letter from R.H. Green, 25.7.1916.

lives of those around them, and the same desire to serve can be seen in the lives of other people in Poplar.¹²²

The concern of the citizen for the common good motivated many of Poplar's organisers of charities, then; they responded as individuals to the duties their citizenship imposed upon them. Those duties were strongly stressed in the context of charitable work in the 1920s, however, and the reasons for this add another dimension to charitable effort in Poplar. Although co-operation between the state and voluntary agencies was growing -- and as has been noted, local state and local charities worked alongside one another in Poplar -- the realm of charitable activity outside the state was seen by some as crucial to the proper functioning of philanthropy. It was commonly argued that the bureaucratic and inhuman procedures of the statutory services could only be leavened by active citizens bringing a human touch to them.

Many of the reasons for wanting this human touch and for resisting state control were articulated by the Charity Organisation Society (COS), which had a branch in Poplar. To the COS, the human element, which tended to be lost in inflexible bureaucratic administrative procedures, was paramount in the administration of charity. The COS believed that charity should not be given indiscriminately, lest those recipients of weak moral fibre should begin to rely on charity and not on the rewards of their own labour. The 'deserving poor' could safely be given charity because their will to work would not be sapped by it, but the 'undeserving', those who loafed and scrounged and expected something for nothing, should be disciplined by the Poor Law and its workhouse. Hence the insistence of the COS on the human element in the distribution of charity, not only for its kindness but also because of its thoroughness which could distinguish the deserving from the

122. For example, W.E. Nicholls and Ben Meers; East London Advertiser, 25.9.1920 and 24.7.1921, and THLHL, letter from Meers, March 1938.

not.¹²³ These arguments were echoed by Poplar's branch of the COS in the 1920s. The branch objected very much to Poplar's Board of Guardians and their policy of indiscriminate relief. 'What we feel is that they proceed upon a too mechanical conception of human nature and human society',¹²⁴ it said, since the Guardians gave relief to anyone who asked without checking their suitability. The result, according to the COS, was that Poplar's population was 'drugged with doles'.¹²⁵

The stress laid by the COS on the moral development of the individual stemmed directly from the discourse of citizenship and the ideas of T.H. Green concerning the self-fulfilment of the individual.¹²⁶ Unlike Green however it was absolutely opposed to the state provision of aid as a right of all. It was convinced that the automatic provision of relief by the state hindered that self-development; of the young people in Poplar, the COS fulminated that 'public assistance has helped greatly to reduce what sense of responsibility they had',¹²⁷ with the result that in Poplar 'there is an atmosphere without hope, without interest, without life or activity -- dead'.¹²⁸ Poplar's branch of the COS again agreed with its superiors. Arguing that self-determination was the key to self-fulfillment, it claimed that the more help an individual received from the state, the less they would be able to struggle themselves to overcome difficulties and the less the individual would develop. 'The helping hand of a

123. C.L. Mowat, The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Work (London, 1961); D. Owen, English Philanthropy 1660-1960 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964).

124. Charity Organisation Society, Annual Report 1922-23 (London, 1924), p.9.

125. J.C. Pringle, Can London Climb out of the Slough of Despond? (London, 1927), p.4.

126. Vincent and Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship, chapter 6.

127. Pringle, Can London Climb Out of the Slough of Despond?, p.5.

128. Pringle, Can London Climb Out of the Slough of Despond?, p.3.

neighbour, held out to one who is scrambling up the albeit sometimes slippery slope (not to any who are lying motionless at the bottom!) is infinitely advisable and beneficial'.¹²⁹

Several of Poplar's charities agreed with the COS,¹³⁰ especially the management of Poplar Hospital. Their objections to the state control of social services were made very clear when the Thames's lightermen's trade unionist and Labour MP Harry Gosling was invited to the annual dinner of the Hospital in 1923. In his speech, Gosling remarked that 'he believed in the principle of the State having the responsibility for the upkeep of the hospitals', but the audience's response was 'cries of No! No!'. The President of Poplar Hospital's Committee of Management, Lord Knutsford, in his reply to Gosling said:

State hospitals ... would be a calamity ... Poor Law Infirmarys were State Hospitals, and their policy had been to do as little as possible and to do it as grudgingly as they could. There was no heart-beat in a Government Department.¹³¹

And the Poor Patients' Fund at Poplar Hospital, which aimed 'to help families through the disaster of having the breadwinner incapacitated from earning wages', was administered with help from the COS.¹³²

This rejection of charity on the grounds of its encouragement of pauperism was another weapon in the armoury of the PBMA in its battles against Poplar's rates, and in fact the COS in Poplar felt that the local

129. Charity Organisation Society, Annual Report 1922-23, p.10.

130. see for example Grant, Earthing Bundles, p.85, and Poplar Benevolent and Accident Relief Society, Annual Report 1925.

131. East London Advertiser, 20.1.1923. For a discussion of the anti-statism among inter-war voluntary hospital administrators, see I. Darlington, 'The King Edward's Hospital Fund for London and its Records', Journal of the Society of Archivists, 2 (1964), 423-30.

132. Poplar Hospital for Accidents, Annual Report 1919, p.7.

businesses were their closest allies.¹³³ The PBMA frequently castigated Poplar's Labour Guardians for their indiscriminate relief policy in the language of the COS:

a generation of men and women is being developed in which there is no conscious obligation to the community, and in which there is a determined purpose to live on public funds. The glorious privilege of being independent is spurned in Poplar. To be a pauper or an incubus on public funds is claimed as a right to be enjoyed.¹³⁴

The fear of the PBMA in the 1920s that 'the present administration is such as to seriously affect the character of many of the People' is understandable.¹³⁵ Most of the members of the PBMA were shopkeepers and businessmen, remember, and relied upon the labour of others for their living; if those others began to look elsewhere for an income then the economic future of the average PBMA member would be bleak indeed. And chapter II suggested that during the unemployment of the 1920s such a rejection of paid labour based upon the availability of alternative income does seem possible.

Hence there was a streak of anti-statism in the politics of the PBMA, which co-existed with its acknowledgement that the state had a duty to help those suffering through no fault of their own. The deserving poor should receive help from the state, but only the deserving: ex-servicemen, for example. This belief that there were limits to legitimate state intervention and to the state's obligations to its citizens encouraged members of the PBMA to help the charities of Poplar. To list a few of the most prominent activists: Thomas Bodley ran his own building business, was a PBMA Guardian and helped to organise the Poplar Children's Carnival; Sir Alfred Warren had a private income, was PBMA president after the war and was vice-president of the Poplar Hospital Saturday Fund in 1922; Sir Alfred Yeo owned a musical instrument shop, was South Poplar's Liberal MP until 1922 and sat on the

133. Charity Organisation Society, Annual Report 1922-23, p.9.

134. PBMA, The Breakdown of Local Government, p.3.

135. PBMAA, letter to Mayor of Poplar, 26.10.1923.

committees of the Poplar Hospital Saturday Fund and Poplar Hospital; and the charitable efforts of Alfred Brandy and Thomas Miller-Jones have already been mentioned and they were both active in Conservative politics.¹³⁶

The intersection of the COS and PBMA in the philanthropic arena in Poplar extended to an aspect of the politics of the PBMA mentioned earlier and that is their demand that people in receipt of relief should be disenfranchised. The COS strongly believed that those who claimed relief had failed in their duty to be independent citizens; and if they had failed in their duty as citizens, then their rights as citizens should also be removed.¹³⁷ This argument was echoed by the PBMA, and supplemented by a belief that democracy was distorted by a generous relief policy which amounted to little less than 'mass bribery' of the electorate.¹³⁸ It argued that 'considering the weakness of human nature ... it is not surprising that those who benefit by the extravagance of relief, and having votes under the Representation of the People Act, 1918, should place in authority those who can and will continue such gifts',¹³⁹ and hence the lobbying of the Ministry of Health to revoke the right of those receiving relief to vote by the PBMA mentioned earlier.¹⁴⁰

Thus far, this section has discussed the role of the individual citizen as both givers and receivers of charity, stressing its appeal to the PBMA. But bourgeois philanthropists also stressed another aspect of charity which the PBMA found equally attractive, and that was the interpretation of community favoured by the PBMA. One of the great virtues of charitable effort to its middle-class organisers was that it united all the people of

136. THLHL, biographical press cuttings collection, and the annual reports of the various organisations.

137. Vincent and Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship, p.126.

138. East London Advertiser, 30.1.1926.

139. PBMAA, circular to PBMA members, 21.9.1925.

140. Deacon and Briggs, 'Local Democracy and Central Policy', p.352.

whatever class with concern in a locality; that is, community overcame the divisions of class. This was of course the notion of community used in conservative definitions of citizenship, and was another reason for the activity of PBMA members in Poplar's charities. The Annual Reports of Poplar Hospital, the Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund, the ELNS and the Poplar Children's Carnival Fund all stress the united effort of workers, shopkeepers and businessmen alike in contributing towards the provision of charitable services in Poplar.

Charity was not confined to the right of the political spectrum in Poplar however. Some Poplar Labour Party members were also active fund-raisers for charity, councillor Joe Ashley, for example,¹⁴¹ and others helped local charities in other ways, George Lansbury in particular.¹⁴² Nor was the Party averse to charity or to making appeals for donations to good causes. Labour councillors administered the Bromley Parochial Charities and Prisca Coborn's Charity (another ancient trust fund),¹⁴³ they asked for money for the local unemployed and when the Thames flooded in 1928 they made an appeal for its Poplar victims.¹⁴⁴ Given Poplar Labour Party's strong commitment to statist welfare provision however, its charitable effort is somewhat surprising; it was probably a simple pragmatic response to local need. It certainly did not involve the same politics as local philanthropy influenced by the COS and PBMA. Despite the Party's charitable work, it hated the arrogance of the COS and PBMA which would deny poor people their basic rights to relief and the vote. George Lansbury described himself as 'a most

141. East London Advertiser, 3.7.1926.

142. Lansbury was sympathetic to the Bow and Bromley Philanthropic Aid Society, Poplar Children's Carnival Fund and the Hospital Saturday Fund; East London Advertiser, 14.2.1925 and 5.1.1924, Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund, Annual Report 1922. For his close association with the American philanthropist Joseph Fels, see M. Fels, Joseph Fels: His Life-Work (London, 1920).

143. PMBC, List of Members, 4 vols (Poplar, 1919-28).

144. East London Advertiser, 16.4.1921 and 14.1.1928.

bitter enemy of the Charity Organisation Society and all its works',¹⁴⁵ and in the face of this determined resistance by the Labour Party to their arguments the COS left Poplar in 1923.¹⁴⁶

In contrast to this hostility, the previous section looked at the consensus between Poplar Labour Party and the PBMA over the need for state intervention to relieve distress caused by unemployment. This section has explored alternative arguments about state intervention, stressing the overlap between the PBMA, the COS and certain local charities in the arguments made in the locality against state interference in the provision of social services. Poplar Hospital and the Hospital Saturday Fund clearly stand out as centres of right-wing activity in the borough in this respect. But not all Poplar's charities were as hostile to the state, and nor can a neat distinction be drawn between a statist Labour Party and a non-statist PBMA; the PBMA supported certain types of intervention and the Labour Party instigated certain charitable funds. Once again, all these positions stemmed from the ambiguity of the citizenship discourse, and all were debated in the locality, at public meetings, in local newspapers, at public events. The complexity of politics in Poplar has once again been stressed, and also its pervasiveness; the politics of the citizenship debate were frequently aired in public. The next section pursues this latter theme further and explores another arena of political debate even further removed from the formal sphere of politics: social work.

Citizenship and social work in Poplar

The term 'social work' was first used at the end of the nineteenth century, and it defined 'the activities of people who had a sense of belonging to a movement which aimed at social advance based on disciplined and principled

145. Lansbury, My Life, p.132.

146. Charity Organisation Society, Annual Report 1922-23, pp.8-11.

forms of social action'.¹⁴⁷ The disciplines and principles for action which became dominant in social work were ones growing from the discourse of citizenship, for:

motives to social work at their best are not the peculiar possession of any class or section in a truly democratic state. They are the common property of all good citizens united in the pursuit of that public good which finds its gradual realisation in the lives of men of every rank and class.¹⁴⁸

The basis of social work was citizenship; it provided not only the motivation for, but also the goal of, social work.

Clearly the distinction between philanthropy and social work is a fine one; both were often funded from voluntary donations, both aimed to alleviate distress and both were inspired by citizenship. Nonetheless, by the 1920s social work was emerging as a distinct profession, particularly through the establishment of social work courses and qualifications.¹⁴⁹ The educational courses on which this professionalisation was built were initiated with the help of the COS. The technique taught on them was casework, and the importance of casework to social work stemmed from the theoretical emphasis of the COS on the morality of the individual. With the individual and their immediate family and community, rather than with the state, lay both the cause and cure of their problems, it was argued; 'legislative and administrative change ... [is] auxiliary to a change of mind'.¹⁵⁰

147. P. Seed, The Expansion of Social Work in Britain (London, 1973), p.3.

148. J. MacCunn, The Ethics of Social Work (London, 1911), p.83.

149. M.J. Smith, Professional Education for Social Work in Britain: An Historical Account (London, 1965); K. Woodroffe, From Charity to Social Work in England and the United States (London, 1962). The professionalisation of some of Poplar's charities during the 1920s, especially the Poplar Association for Befriending Girls and the East London Nursing Society, is notable, and by the end of the decade they should be classified as social work agencies rather than charities.

150. B. Bosanquet, 'The Philosophy of Casework', Charity Organisation Society Review, 39 (1916), 117-33 (p.133).

If casework was the means, one of the most important ends of social work was the fostering of community. 'The aim of social case-work is thought of as the restoration of ailing individuals to a full and healthy functioning in society';¹⁵¹ integration into the existing community was the goal of social work. Social workers themselves should also unite themselves as individuals with their community, through their motivation for work: 'on the one hand, broadened into civic patriotism, and, on the other, intensified and humanised by sympathy'.¹⁵² This was the orthodoxy of social work in the 1920s, and the sub-section below examines its practices in Poplar.

Orthodox social work in Poplar

There were two ways in which this orthodox, integrationist social work was to be found in Poplar: in the activities of settlements and in workplace welfare work. Each will now be studied in turn.

Settlements in Poplar

One of the most important strategies meant to achieve an integrated community was the settlement. The settlement movement began in the 1880s and was deeply influenced by T.H. Green.¹⁵³ It wanted to bridge the gap between the classes in the Victorian city, a gap which was both geographical and cultural; this was to be achieved by middle-class people settling in the working-class areas of cities, making contact with their neighbours, sharing with them their education and civilisation and creating a vibrant civic life in which both middle- and working-class people participated. The settlement 'ensured, in areas

151. H. Jennings, 'Voluntary Case-Work Societies', in Voluntary Social Services Since 1918 edited by H. A. Mess (London, 1948), pp.55-68 (p.55).

152. MacCunn, Ethics of Social Work, p.22.

153. Vincent and Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship, chapter 8.

which would otherwise have lacked them, citizens of spirit to undertake civic tasks'.¹⁵⁴

In the 1920s no less than twelve settlements flourished in Poplar, as the map on the next page shows. They were popular institutions,¹⁵⁵ and they provided a variety of social services to local people. The Women's Presbyterian Settlement established a housing association to enable Poplar people to buy a decent home; Clara Grant's Fern Street Settlement provided libraries and health care; Kingsley Hall ran a Baby Clinic and a nursery, as did the Settlement of the Holy Child Jesus; and all settlements tried to be social centres of their districts, organising classes, dances, lectures, whist evenings, amateur dramatics, discussion groups and sports teams.¹⁵⁶ However, it was not so much the form of these settlement activities which defined them as social work centres as their content, those disciplines and principles which distinguished social work from philanthropy.

The purpose of these activities was certainly to improve the lot of the poor in Poplar, to make the settlement 'a place of love and faith and power to those who find life bitter and overwhelming' in the words of the warden of the Women's Settlement on East India Dock Road;¹⁵⁷ but according to Clara Grant it was also to give to Poplar a much-needed 'leavening influence of residents

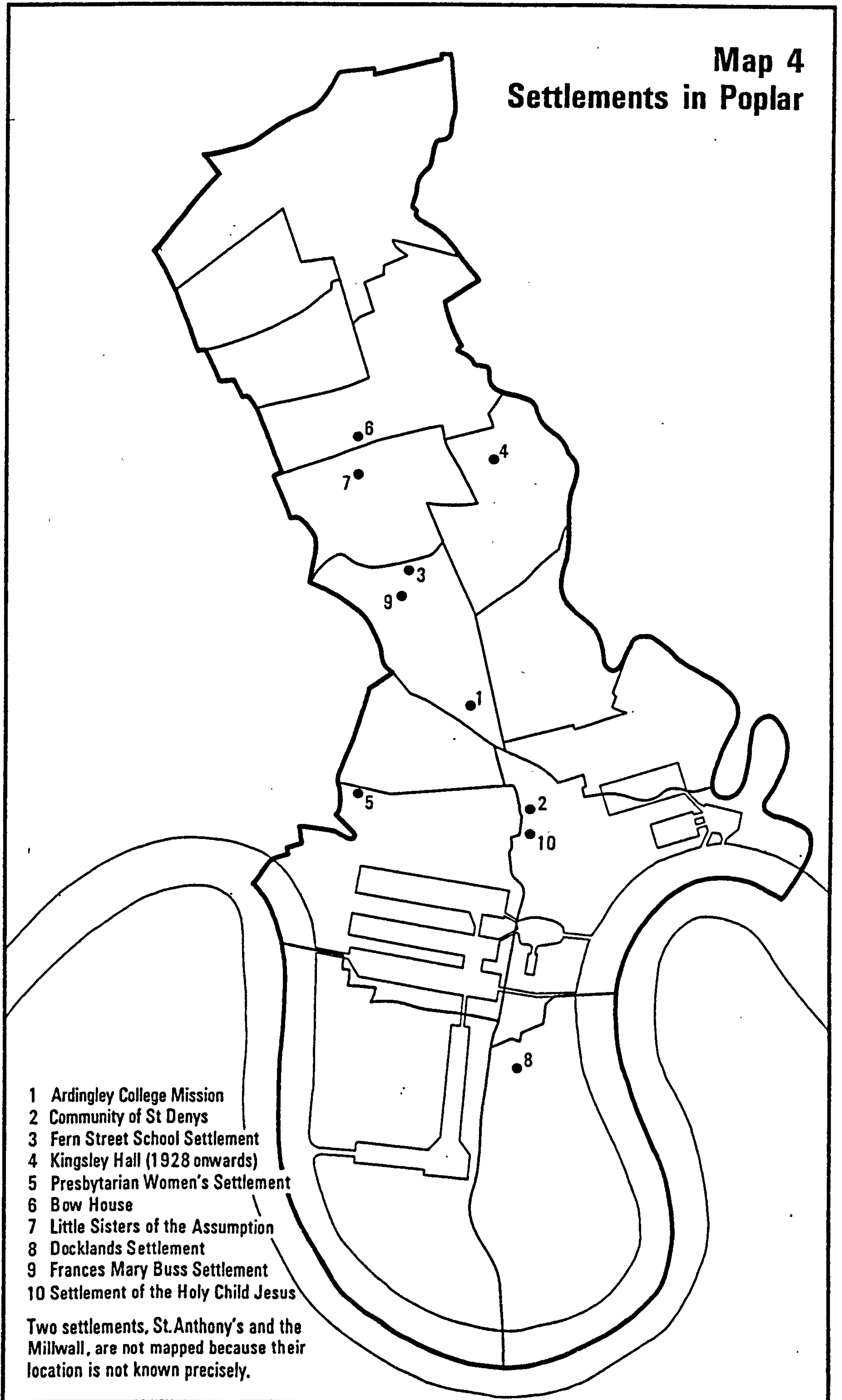
154. W. Beveridge, Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance (London, 1948), p.132.

155. interviews by the author; New Survey MC, file 3/10, Survey of Social Work Borough by Borough, pp.21-22.

156. THLHL, Women's Presbyterian Settlement, Annual Report 1929 (Poplar, 1930); THLHL, North London Collegiate School, Bromley-by-Bow Fund Report, 8 vols (London, 1920-27); THLHL, Kingsley Hall, Annual Report, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29); East London Advertiser, 22.9.1928, 29.6.1929; C.C. Martindale, 'The Poplar Settlement', The Month, 155 (1930), 109-18; R. Kennedy-Cox, An Autobiography (London, 1931).

157. Women's Presbyterian Settlement, Annual Report 1929, p.8.

Map 4 Settlements in Poplar



with minds more richly endowed than its own'.¹⁵⁸ Grant did think that East Enders could give those richly endowed minds something in return however, and she therefore saw settlements as places of co-operation between Poplar people and educated social workers. For her, this co-operation lead to the overcoming of class divisions, and, like conservative interpretations of citizenship, she saw the community rather than class as the central unit of social organisation. 'Life as it is meant to be', she wrote, 'is a growing out from the "me" to the "WE" -- from the self-centred "me" of babyhood to the slowly widening circle of relationships and of co-operation with others, with its necessary careful balancing of the claims of the individual and of the community in which it finds itself'.¹⁵⁹ In the same spirit of trying to overcome class divisions, the Presbyterian Settlement justified its housing association by arguing that the bad housing of Poplar 'make home life and happiness impossible, lead to moral and spiritual deterioration, and breed dangerous bitterness and class strife'.¹⁶⁰

This goal of integrating the individual into the existing community was most obvious in the efforts of social workers among the youth of Poplar. The 'adolescent' first emerged as a social category at the turn of the century, but even before then organisations had been founded to inculcate what they saw as decent values into young people; as Beveridge said, 'upon the formation of the right attitude to life of those who are now adolescent depends the prospect of having a democracy capable of rising to its responsibilities'.¹⁶¹ The 'right attitude' was of course the consideration of the community before self or class -- was in fact citizenship.

158. C. Grant, From Me to We (Forty Years on Bow Common) (Bromley-by-Bow, 1940), p.vii.

159. Grant, From Me to We, p.1.

160. New Survey MC, file 1/4, Presbyterian Housing Limited, The Church and Housing (London, 1932?), p.6.

161. Beveridge, Voluntary Action, p.138.

The Dockland Settlement on the Isle of Dogs had over a thousand members at the end of the 1920s, and its organiser Reginald Kennedy-Cox believed that it existed 'not just for commercial purposes, but for the far more important purpose of trying to mould the outlook of of hundreds, perhaps even of thousands of growing young men'.¹⁶² He wanted self-fulfillment for his club members and believed that 'there is a crying need to supply facilities for young people to develop all that is best in themselves',¹⁶³ but his notion of what was fulfilling was quite specific; he tried to persuade his members to look for regular jobs and not casual ones, he promoted temperance and encouraged sports activities which taught the virtues of selflessness, modesty and teamwork. Like the National Association of Boy's Clubs, to which the Dockland Settlement was affiliated, Kennedy-Cox felt that 'the practical aim of the club is to train the boy for the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship'.¹⁶⁴

There were many other clubs for boys in Poplar which promoted the same ideals of citizenship. Boy's Brigades, Scouts and Church Lads' Brigades were quite common, and, as their historian has noted, were 'instruments for the reinforcement of social conformity'.¹⁶⁵ In the late 1920s 10 per cent of boys in Poplar were members of one or other of these organisations.¹⁶⁶ The Red Triangle Club in Bow had about four hundred members and aimed 'to make Christian citizens' of them by promoting fellowship and

162. R. Kennedy-Cox, Through the Dock Gates (London, 1939), p.66.

163. Kennedy-Cox, Through the Dock Gates, p.52.

164. National Association of Boys' Clubs, Annual Report 1930-31 (London, 1931), p.4.

165. J. Springhall, Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements 1883-1940 (London, 1977), p.16.

166. New Survey, IX, pp.190-91. For the ideology of such organisations, see M. Blanch, 'Imperialism, Nationalism and Organised Youth', in Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory, edited by J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson (London, 1979), pp.103-20, and Springhall, Youth, Empire and Society.

brotherhood;¹⁶⁷ in 1922 the Ardingley College Mission opened in Carmen Street, Poplar, with the explicit aim of inculcating loyalty to church, king and empire in the boys who came to use its gym and billiards table.¹⁶⁸

If the purpose of youth clubs was 'to save the youth of the nation for the nation's future service',¹⁶⁹ girls should be involved the project too, and indeed a manual for social workers in girls' clubs published in 1919 argued that girls were also important citizens, with as much ability to serve the community as boys; 'the future holds rich possibilities for the clubs and the faithful leaders who early caught the vision of [girls'] potentialities for national service'.¹⁷⁰ There was however a clear gender division among youth clubs in the borough. The techniques used by boys' clubs -- the militarist overtones of the uniformed youth organisations, the football and cricket teams -- were not those used by girls' clubs. The Frances Mary Buss Settlement in Bow wanted to encourage the potential of each of its two hundred or so members by cultivating their sense of loyalty, duty and service, but it did so through activities such as dancing, dramatics, singing, cooking and eurhythmic, all of which it believed encouraged citizenship among participants.¹⁷¹

Even youth clubs were implicated in the political discourse of citizenship, then; nor could it be escaped in the workplace.

167. New Survey MC, file 3/7, Red Triangle Club leaflet (n.d.).

168. East End News, 2.10.1925.

169. National Association of Boys' Clubs, Annual Report 1928-29 (London, 1929), p.12.

170. H.J. Ferris, Girls' Clubs: Their Organisation and Management (London, 1918), p.xiii.

171. North London Collegiate School, Annual Report 1927; S.A. Burstall, Frances Mary Buss: An Educational Pioneer (London, 1938), p.71.

Welfare work in Poplar

The integrationist aims of social work penetrated the workplace through welfare work schemes. Welfare work was a branch of social work which developed extensively for the first time in the munitions factories of the First World War and by the early 1920s, welfare workers had formed a professional organisation, were publishing a journal and were establishing welfare work training courses.¹⁷²

The aim of welfare work was to overcome the division between employer and employed so that both could co-operate and further the interests of the state-community.¹⁷³ This notion of a community labouring together for a common goal, central to the citizenship idea, was based on 'a sense of the inherent unity which lies or should lie at the heart of all production, and which logically implies co-operation'.¹⁷⁴ Welfare work was common in Poplar's larger workplaces. It will now be explored not only to demonstrate once again the pervasiveness and importance of the citizenship discourse, but also as one reason for the quiescence of Poplar workers noted in the last chapter.

The practical expression of the citizenship of welfare work consisted of 'voluntary efforts on the part of employers to improve, within the existing industrial system, the conditions of employment in their own factories':¹⁷⁵ the work environment, wages, hours, physical health, mental development and personal dignity. Many Poplar employers initiated activities which fall into these categories. Factories in Poplar ran clubs and organised social events for their employees, and this was often the task of the company's welfare worker. Bryant and May

172. M.M. Niven, Personnel Management 1913-63: The Growth of Personnel Management and the Development of the Institute (London, 1967).

173. A.M. Anderson, The Newer Developments in Industrial Welfare (London, 1921); B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions (London, 1920), p.102; E.D. Proud, Welfare Work: Employers' Experiments for Improving Working Conditions in Factories, third edition (London, 1918), p.102.

174. E.T. Kelly and M.L. Haskins, Foundations of Industrial Welfare (London, 1927), p.5.

175. Proud, Welfare Work, p.5.

funded social clubs and sponsored a works orchestra and an athletic association. The Commercial Gas Company had a sports club, and the Gas, Light and Coke Company also had a sports association. Haye's Cocoa Company ran a social club. The London, Midland and Scottish Railway had horticultural, musical, orchestral, photographic, scout and fur and feather societies; the London and North Eastern Railway had among other clubs a Temperance Union, a Rifle Club and a Lecture and Debating Society. Nestles funded a girls' club. The Anglo-American Oil Company had sports teams and a Chess Circle.¹⁷⁶ All of these large employers also helped to run factory outings, and 130 local companies and individuals subscribed to the Community Singers' Association which organised workplace sing-songs.¹⁷⁷

Health and provident schemes were also common,¹⁷⁸ and so was co-partnership, or profit-sharing. At its most basic, co-partnership was a sharing of a predetermined proportion of the company's profits among its workers in the form of a cash bonus. Sometimes all of the bonus was paid into a provident fund for sickness benefits and pensions, sometimes workers were encouraged (or even forced) to convert their bonus into company shares. Co-partnership was as cloaked in the language of citizenship by its enthusiasts as was welfare work. The Industrial Co-Partnership Association for example claimed in 1927 that

176. Bryant and May Ltd., Brymay Magazine, passim; Commercial Gas Company, Co-Partnership Herald, passim; Gas, Light and Coke Company, Co-Partners' Magazine, passim; East London Advertiser, 27.3.1920; London, Midland and Scottish Railway, LMS Railway Magazine, passim; London and North Eastern Railway, Great Eastern Railway Magazine, passim; Anglo-American Oil Company, Anglo-American Journal, passim. For an overview of welfare work in the inter-war period, see H. Jones, 'Employers' Welfare Schemes and Industrial Relations in Inter-War Britain', Business History, 15 (1983), 61-75.

177. BMA, file D/B/BRY/1/2/775, correspondence with the Community Singers' Association, 1925-1933, list of Poplar subscribers to the Association, (n.d.).

178. see Bryant and May Ltd, Brymay Co-Partnership: Also Provident Schemes and Welfare Organisations (London, 1934); Anglo-American Journal, April 1919, p.6; National Maritime Museum, R.H. Green and Silley Weir archive, Board minute book, 5.12.1934.

co-partnership altered the nature of industry so that 'it will be conducted for the good of the community, giving due reward to the capitalist, and providing to the utmost for the welfare of the employees -- welfare of body, mind and spirit ... the production of noble citizens will be the main project'.¹⁷⁹ Citizens were produced by co-partnership because of the unity of interest within a company which it fostered. Seven major employers of Poplar people ran co-partnership schemes: Clarke, Nickolls and Coombs, a confectionery firm in Hackney Wick, Achilles Serre, a large laundry also in Hackney Wick, Brooke Bond had a large factory in Aldgate which employed Poplar many women, the East Ferry Road Engineering Company, Cory's, a lighterage company, the Commercial Gas Company, the Gas, Light and Coke Company and Bryant and May.¹⁸⁰

Motivations for these activities were mixed. Some employers were no doubt impelled by a genuine desire to improve the lives of their workforce. Yet behind these philanthropic impulses was another powerful reason for employers to adopt welfare work techniques in their factories: profit. Welfare work was thought to increase output and efficiency and reduce strikes. The chair of the Anglo-American Oil Company certainly believed this. In 1921 he presided at the inauguration of the company's Camera Club, exhorting its members to 'cultivate loyalty. Increase efficiency. Develop initiative',¹⁸¹ for this would improve their photography and, incidentally, their daily work for the company. He believed too, like his welfare worker, that clubs promoted unity within the company and would therefore reduce costly strikes.¹⁸² Similarly Bryant and May provided a club for their women

179. E. W. Mundy, Profit-Sharing and Co-Partnership: An Introduction second edition, (London, 1928), pp.27-28.

180. Report on Profit-Sharing and Labour Co-Partnership in the United Kingdom, cmd.544 (PP 1920, vol XXIII), pp.150-62.

181. Anglo-American Journal, March 1921, p.178.

182. Anglo-American Journal, March 1921, p.178 and February 1921, p.172.

workers which was 'very active'¹⁸³, and where 'there is taught (or to use a more appropriate word) instilled into all the essential principles of good citizenship',¹⁸⁴ which were of course unity and co-operation. Works Committees, on which both workers and management sat, were also thought by Bryant and May to solve 'the labour difficulty by determining a spirit of brotherhood shall exist throughout the whole company.'¹⁸⁵ Company journals stressed the unity of interests among all those who worked for a firm, and most of Poplar's large employers published one.

Co-partnership schemes too were seen by employers as a way of averting labour disputes and increasing efficiency by giving workers a material stake in the profitability of the firm. Clarke, Nickolls and Coombs stated bluntly that co-partnership was 'essentially a business proposition'.¹⁸⁶ The Commercial Gas Company, with over half of its output coming from its Poplar works, was typical in its assertion that its employees should 'share with the stockholders the ownership of the Company, and that, being thus interested in it, they would work for it with a remembrance of their stake in it'.¹⁸⁷

The government shared the conviction of employers that welfare work reduced industrial unrest. A 1920 Ministry of Labour report on co-partnership noted that 'as a means of developing the sense of community of interest between employer and employed, it seems possible to speak with considerable confidence of these schemes.'¹⁸⁸ They made workers grateful to their company and in particular made chairmen popular figures, 'beloved by the workers'.¹⁸⁹

183. New Survey MC, file 3/10, Survey of Social Work Borough by Borough, p.22.

184. Bryant and May Ltd, Brymay Co-Partnership, p.14.

185. Brymay Magazine, June 1922, p.178.

186. THLHL, Clarke, Nickolls and Coombs, The Proof of the Pudding: Being Some Notes on Co-Partnership and Profit-Sharing (London, 1919), p.5.

187. Co-Partnership Herald, March 1931, p.3.

188. Report on Profit-Sharing, p.iv.

189. East London Advertiser, 31.3.1934.

When the chair of Bryant and May took all the workers to Blackpool for a day to celebrate twenty-five years of his involvement in the company and entered the restaurant where they were eating lunch, 'never was there such a spontaneous outburst of welcome, and it was maintained on the top note throughout the whole progress around the rooms'.¹⁹⁰ Welfare work and co-partnership may be one reason then for Poplar workers' quiescence. Bombarded with argument and able to win real improvements in working conditions through works committees established by company welfare workers, for example,¹⁹¹ workers would see little reason in striking.

Social work, like citizenship, has been attacked as a conservative project the only goal of which is to socialise so-called deviants into bourgeois norms.¹⁹² This is certainly a fair criticism of the social work in 1920s Poplar examined so far: settlements, youth clubs and welfare work. It was not however true of all social work in the locality, as the next sub-section explains.

Radical social work in Poplar

Social work did have radical potential; as one of its practitioners argued, 'it is not a movement concerned alone with the material, with housing and drains, clinics and feeding centres, gas and water, but is the expression of the desire for social justice, for freedom and beauty, and for the better apportionment of all the things that make up a good life'.¹⁹³ This section now turns to the radical

190. Brymay Magazine, July 1923, p.204.

191. The Works Committee at Bryant and May's won workers a men's club, funding for sports teams, a Tontine Society, a more varied canteen menu, machine guards, their annual holiday when they wanted it, and a piano in the canteen; BMA, Fairfield Works Committee, minutes of meetings, passim. This won Bryant and May the reputation of Poplar's best employer; M.D. Reed, Elizabeth Pepperell, 21 June 1914 to 24 May 1971 (London, 1973), p.19.

192. R. Bailey and M. Brake, Radical Social Work (London, 1975).

193. Attlee, The Social Worker, p.2.

social workers in Poplar, and offers some reasons for their prominence.

One example of a more critical social work was a boys' club in Poplar which defied the jingoism and imperialism of many youth organisations and instead encouraged socialism, internationalism and pacifism. It seems to have been connected with the ILP; local socialists were one reason for resistance to orthodox social work locally then.¹⁹⁴

The most important exception to orthodox social work in the borough however was the activities of Kingsley Hall. Kingsley Hall was in its foundation typical of a Victorian settlement; it was established by two wealthy sisters, Muriel and Doris Lester, in 1915, after their experience of working in a club for factory girls in the district.¹⁹⁵ The anti-statist pacifism of Muriel has already been mentioned, and the symbolism used in the ceremony of laying the foundation stones of the new Hall when it was rebuilt in 1928 as a result of its popularity gives an idea of its other concerns; stones were laid to represent the Borough, Citizenship, Music, Beauty, Health, Nature, Internationalism, Education and the Politics of Grace.¹⁹⁶ As the last named indicates, the basic ethic of the Hall was Christianity, and this aspect of its work will be discussed in chapter V.

Of the two Lester sisters, Muriel was responsible for Kingsley Hall, and she believed in the right of each individual to full moral and spiritual development. She rejected the individualism of the COS and its casework methods however, in two senses. Firstly, she believed that a social revolution was necessary to enable people to become fulfilled; 'never rest until the present method of distributing the good and beautiful things is altered',¹⁹⁷ she exclaimed in the Hall's journal, and, apart from her

194. Springhall, Youth, Empire and Society, pp.112-16. The annual report of the club on which Springhall bases his description went missing from THLHL in 1981.

195. M. Lester, It Occurred to Me (London, 1937).

196. Kingsley Hall, Annual Report 1927, p.3.

197. THLHL, Kingsley Hall, The Glean, November 1919, p.1.

appointment as a Labour alderman (sic) in 1922, she campaigned for women's suffrage, spoke for the railwaymen on strike in 1919, and in the late 1930s helped to organise the Poplar and Stepney Association Against Unemployment.¹⁹⁸ She was not alone among Poplar social workers in her political activism. Attlee, himself a social worker and Labour politician in neighbouring Limehouse, believed that 'one of the greatest services that the social worker can do is getting elected onto local bodies',¹⁹⁹ and several of Poplar's social workers did so as Labour candidates: Helen Mackay of the Women's Presbyterian Settlement was a Labour Guardian; the Frances Mary Buss Settlement's Ishbel MacDonald was elected South Poplar's Labour LCC councillor in 1928; Jane March was a health visitor and a Labour councillor.²⁰⁰ Social work could then lead to radical politics. The journal of Kingsley Hall contained monthly 'Citizenship Reports' in which Poplar councillors and Guardians reported on the work of the Board and council, and several of Poplar's left-wing politicians were associated with Kingsley Hall especially: Bill Sell, George Lansbury, Bert Goodway and H. Le Fevre.²⁰¹

The second means by which Muriel Lester defied the orthodoxy of contemporary social work was in the way Kingsley Hall was run. The activities of the Hall were much the same as other settlements in the area, even if their contents were rather different; the study circles and discussion groups met to discuss subjects of concern to the

198. East London Advertiser, 2.9.1922; Lester, It Occurred to Me, p.81; Marx Memorial Library, W. Hannington papers, B II, letter to Le Gros Clark, 15.5.1939.

199. Attlee, The Social Worker, p.122. Clarke also suggests that social worker should be active in local government; Clarke, Local Government, p.437.

200. Election results in the East London Advertiser, passim.

201. The Gleam, 1919-20; East London Advertiser, 29.10.1927 and 12.3.1927; Lester, It Occurred to Me, p.50; Kingsley Hall, executive council, minutes of meetings, 19.8.1927. Le Fevre led a short-lived communist ex-servicemen's organisation; Workers' Dreadnought, 3.4.1920.

left like Russia, Ireland and Gandhi, for example.²⁰² But the running of the Hall was left almost entirely in the hands of its members, something the more conservative settlement workers in Poplar disapproved of,²⁰³ because Muriel believed that the democratic burden, by encouraging consideration of others, would lead its bearers to their higher selves. Another means of self-fulfillment was the two minutes of silence for prayer or meditation which closed each evening at the Hall; those experiencing this felt liberated and exhilarated at the feeling of 'the comradeship and the fellowship and the utter trust' generated among those present.²⁰⁴ There appears to have been a real egalitarianism at the Hall, with Muriel remembering in later years the 'glorious wide friendships, so many of them, so outgoing',²⁰⁵ which she believed followed directly from Christ's dictum to love thy neighbour.²⁰⁶

Just as the desire of employers to reduce industrial unrest encouraged integrationist welfare work, Muriel Lester had her reasons for a radical interpretation of the citizenship of social work: left-wing politics and Christianity. But one further communal sensibility was relevant to both radical and orthodox social work: gender.

Gender and social work

Vicinus has suggested that in settlements run by women and whose services were used mostly by women, a solidarity between women based on gender may well have overcome

202. THLHL, correspondence from M. Lester to the Borough Librarian, 1920-27.

203. see for example Kennedy-Cox, Through the Dock Gate, pp.47-49.

204. THLHL, interview with M. Lester by A.H. French, 17.1.1968, p.15. For a member's account of Kingsley Hall, see L. Valentine, Two Sisters and the Cockney Kids (London, 1978).

205. interview with French, p.15.

206. Lester and Pullen, Shall I Pull My Weight?, p.13.

distinctions of class.²⁰⁷ The role of gender in the construction of a united community of citizens will now briefly be discussed.

All but two of Poplar's settlements were run by women and, with their baby clinics and nurseries and jumble sales and mothers' meetings and girls' clubs, were frequented mostly by women. Muriel Lester's account of the way the friendships she achieved at Kingsley Hall had overcome the divisions of class may be more than just sentimental memories then. She said:

We were close friends, that was the great thing. We were there as friends, very close friends, and we'd say anything to each other. There was no class barrier at all.²⁰⁸

The intimate relationships Lester recalls are echoed in an account by a member of Kingsley Hall's Women's Club which locates the basis of friendships in women's shared experiences. 'These cold, dark winter afternoons it is good to sit in a cosy circle round the fire and exchange views and share one another's joys and troubles'.²⁰⁹ About a hundred women belonged to the club to share this specifically female sociability.²¹⁰ When Muriel's father died in 1927 and left her an annual income, the two aspects of her ethos -- its egalitarianism and its female solidarity -- came together, for she put the legacy into trust fund and called a meeting of the wives of Poplar to decide how it was to be spent.²¹¹

As well as this communality based on gender, Muriel Lester was also able to overcome class distinctions by her absolute self-forgetfulness. A description of Mary Hughes, a close friend of Muriel's who worked in Stepney and shared

207. M. Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920 (London, 1985), pp.211-15.

208. Lester interviewed by French, p.6.

209. Kingsley Hall, Annual Report 1922, p.23.

210. GLP, volume 11, letter from Kingsley Hall, 22.2.1933.

211. Lester, It Occurred to Me, pp.143-46; East London Advertiser, 29.10.1927. The women chose to use the money to pay for home-helps.

Muriel's ideals, gives some idea of this dedication to the poor of east London:

Her life itself must be her work, but it could be her work only if it were lived in the appropriate circumstances. She didn't want to visit the poor. She wanted to be with the poor and to be poor herself ... It was a question of being rather than doing. You trusted to the contagion of goodness rather than to homily or sermon.²¹²

Mary Hughes and Muriel Lester lived in as much poverty as their East End neighbours; Muriel owned only two dresses.²¹³ And like Mary, Muriel believed that 'only in service, in losing oneself in a cause, in substituting God's will for one's own, lies joy'.²¹⁴ This lack of ego and desire to serve others are peculiarly feminine attributes,²¹⁵ and almost all social and welfare workers in the 1920s were women. Thus Muriel Lester's sense of duty and service and experience of community -- both central concepts of citizenship, especially the overtly Christian citizenship of Green -- were influenced by gender, and no doubt this gendering affected both radical and conservative social work; women's roles reinforced the notions of community and service at the heart of its citizenship.

This section has explored the citizenship of social work. Once again, the political ambiguity of the discourses of citizenship has been described, with the integrationist goals of settlements, youth work and welfare work being compared to the more liberating practices of Kingsley Hall. And once again, the extension of political ideas into the institutions of civil society has been a theme. So too has the complexity of interpretations of community and citizenship; in particular, the importance of

212. R. Hobhouse, Mary Hughes: Her Life for the Dispossessed (London, 1949), p.vi.

213. Valentine, Two Sisters and the Cockney Kids, chapter V (unpaginated).

214. Lester, Kill or Cure?, p.12.

215. for discussions of this aspect of the construction of the female gender, see F.K. Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England (Oxford, 1980); Vicinus, Independent Women.

gender to the understanding of those two keywords has been stressed.

Citizenship and industrial relations

Poplar's industrial quiescence was described in chapter II, and it was suggested there that one explanation was the preference among Poplar's workers for political rather than industrial action to win change. Earlier in this chapter another reason was offered: welfare work. A further cause lies in the belief of the leaders of local labour in a conservative understanding of the citizenship idea which encouraged progress through co-operation and negotiation, not confrontation and conflict.

Trade unionists did on occasion make use of the notion of citizenship for radical ends. They would stress the development and fulfillment of the individual and go on to demand the material, social and political conditions necessary for its achievement; that was how Ernest Bevin, the general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, justified his claim in 1920 for a sixteen shilling a day minimum wage for dockers. Arguing that sixteen shillings was the absolute minimum necessary for a civilised and spiritually adequate life, and 'having regard to the progress of civilisation and the result of education and the growing aspirations of the people', he believed that 'on the grounds of citizenship ... the men have proved their claim'.²¹⁶ The majority report of the inquiry into this claim agreed.

The true and substantial case presented by the dockers was based upon a broad appeal for a better standard of living. What is a better standard of living? By this is not meant the right merely to have a subsistence allowance, in the sense of keeping the soul and body of the worker together, but a right to have a life ordered upon a higher standard, with full regard to those comforts and decencies which are promotive of better habits, which give a chance for the development of a greater sense of self-respect, and which betoken a

216. Transport Workers -- Court of Inquiry, Vol I: Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Inquiry, cmd.936 (PP 1920, vol XXIV), p.344 and p.44.

higher regard for the place occupied by these workers in the scheme of citizenship.²¹⁷

Poplar council used the same argument to justify its £4 minimum wage policy. In the words of Charlie Key,

the Council has never been a party to the idea that wages should be related exclusively to the cost of living. It has held, and still holds, that it is the duty of a public authority to be a model employer, and therefore to pay such remuneration as will enable the worker not merely live and reproduce others of his kind, but which will enable him to enjoy and appreciate the amenities of life which the advance of science, knowledge and civilisation is placing at his disposal.²¹⁸

Another connection between workers and radical interpretations of citizenship in Poplar itself was the involvement of trade unions in Kingsley Hall. The General Workers' Union provided stewards at the Hall's opening,²¹⁹ three trade unionists sat on the Hall's trust fund which provided home-helps for the neighbourhood,²²⁰ and Albert Goodway, a Labour councillor and branch secretary of the Postal Workers' Federation, was a founder of the men's meeting at the Hall.²²¹

But citizenship was most often used to argue for industrial peace in the 1920s.

The State and its citizens are on the way to a clear consciousness that they are partners on the industrial enterprise. Nay, the conception of 'partnership' is inadequate to the intimacy of the relationship. Not only are there contributions from both sides to every item both of the material and of the moral product, proving that both the individual and the State have been active, but there must be one will, devoted to one good.²²²

Workers should consider the common good. Thus if trade union leaders adopted the language of citizenship to make

217. Transport Workers -- Court of Inquiry, p.vii-viii.

218. C.W. Key, Red Poplar: Six Years of Socialist Rule (London, 1925), pp.46-47.

219. Lester, It Occurred To Me, p.58.

220. East London Advertiser, 29.10.1927.

221. Lester, It Occurred to Me, p.50.

222. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship, p.170; and see Jacks, Constructive Citizenship, p.152.

demands of behalf of the workers, the same language encouraged a belief in compromise and conciliation to achieve the common good, rather than conflict leading to the outright victory or defeat of class interests. This is especially clear in the case of Bevin, a great negotiator on behalf of worker-citizens,²²³ but he was characteristic of the moderacy of the labour movement in Britain as a whole.

Many of Poplar's workers were in industries with Joint Industrial Councils, which were in effect collective bargaining bodies, and which were established after the war on the recommendation of the so-called Whitley Reports. They were 'to have as [their] object the regular consideration of matters affecting the progress and well-being of the trade from the point of view of all those engaged in it, so far as this is consistent with the general interest of the community.'²²⁴ Both workers and employers sat on them to establish wages and conditions of work by negotiation rather than confrontation; they had the blessing of the state but the state was not directly involved in them.²²⁵ In Poplar shiprepairers, dockers, railwaymen, matchmakers, flourmillers, engineers, gasworkers, furniture and chemical workers, printers, postal workers and local authority employees were all covered by Joint Industrial Councils. All negotiated before striking, a form of co-operation with employers based on the idea of community and the common good, and this notion of the common good seems to have had some influence among Poplar's workers; in 1924 the employees of

223. A. Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Volume One, Trade Union Leader 1881-1940 (London, 1960).

224. Reconstruction Committee, Sub-Committee on Relations Between Employers and Employed, Interim Report on Joint Standing Industrial Councils, cmd.8606 (PP 1917-18, vol XVII), p.3.

225. C. Wrigley, 'Introduction', in A History of British Industrial Relations, volume II: 1914-39, edited by C. Wrigley (Brighton, 1987), pp.1-22. For a specific example of resistance by employers and trade unions to state intervention in their industry, see G. Phillips and N. Whiteside, Casual Labour: The Unemployment Question in the Port Transport Industry 1880-1970 (Oxford, 1985).

Thomas Miller-Jones's factory gave him a cigarette case as 'a mark of their appreciation of his efforts towards bridging the gulf between capital and labour'.²²⁶

Although a rhetoric of citizenship could win some improvements for workers then, its more important role was the encouragement of industrial moderacy through a stress on negotiation and compromise.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the diversity of interpretations of the idea of citizenship in 1920s Poplar. Beginning with an account of late-Victorian Idealist philosophy, it was suggested that the idea of citizenship did have politically radical potential; however, the annexation of the notion of citizenship by the late 1920s to a much more conservative politics was also described, the hallmark of this later citizenship being an emphasis on loyalty to community instead of class.

The course of local debates and interpretations of citizenship in Poplar was then charted. The use of community as a concept in opposition to class was prominent in the rhetoric of the ratepayers' party in Poplar, the PBMA. Poplar Labour Party also had a sense of community, based on locally resident voting citizens. But, as Chapter II described, class was crucial to the self-identity of Poplar Labour Party, and its idea of community was thus overlaid with class solidarity. Thus the PBMA distinguished between class and community, while the Labour Party fused the two together. On one issue they were agreed however, and that was the obligation of the central state to provide for the unemployed.

This consensus on the role of the state did not extend into the sphere of philanthropic activity in the borough. Although some of Poplar's charities did co-operate with the state, others refused to do so, preferring to argue, with the COS, that state benefits, given automatically, sapped the will of people to be independent. The PBMA was also

226. East London Advertiser, 25.1.1924.

sympathetic to this argument, and this doubt as to the good of state benefits made many of its members active in Poplar's charities. Social work, through the formative influence of the COS in its professionalisation, also tended to reject state intervention and tried instead to construct a community beyond the divisions of class. Settlements, youth clubs and welfare work attempted to bridge the gulf of class by integrating individuals into the social status quo. Yet there were social workers in Poplar who accepted state intervention and became Labour Party councillors; there was also the influential Muriel Lester who, as a Christian and a pacifist, was highly critical of the contemporary secular state and argued that it was, in fact, an oppressive force.

Finally, the industrial relations effective in Poplar's major industries also rejected the intervention of the state, but to a much less radical effect than Muriel Lester. Their citizenship was essentially constitutionalist.

The discourse of citizenship never provided a single coherent political position in 1920s Poplar then. It led to conflict and division over the issue of state intervention in society, over definitions of community, and over the rights of citizens to relief and to the vote. It also led to some unexpected agreements, between the PBMA and Poplar Labour Party for example over the responsibility for unemployment relief and between Muriel Lester's and the COS's rejection of the state. It is this complexity and diversity which the chapter has been at pains to represent, a diversity which class-theoretical accounts ignore but without which the politics of Poplar are incomprehensible.

And if this chapter, like the last, questions the class-theoreticism of locality-studies, so too it queries their structuralism. Political debate among advocates of radical and conservative citizenship was extensive in Poplar, and existed in places other than the workshop or factory or political meeting. Persuasion and propaganda were clearly seen as crucial to the winning of support for political opinions; people heard the arguments and considered them and came to their own conclusions.

Political beliefs do not therefore seem attributable to class or labour market structures, but to politicisation processes. These processes are ignored by structuralist locality-studies, as the first chapter argued, and the next chapter supports more fully the claim that they are in fact crucial to the understanding of local political support.

This is not to suggest that people chose their politics entirely at random. There were reasons for certain group's adherences to certain arguments, and this chapter has mentioned some of them: the compulsion to social service among women social workers, taken to an extreme of self-denial by Muriel Lester and encouraged by women's gendered social role, for example, and the dull compulsion of economic relationships which made the PBMA sympathetic to the COS for fear of losing their willing workforce. But these were not laws of political commitment; they were chosen by individuals, and much of this chapter has been spent listening to their reasons for doing so. Beliefs and ideologies, political or otherwise, must be discovered through cultural interpretation rather than assumed through structural analyses.

The interpretation of politics is also crucial because, as this chapter has been concerned to demonstrate, politics in Poplar were not simply a scaled-down version of these debates in the national arena; Kingsley Hall's radicalism existed for many years in Poplar after the Conservative Party had won the language of citizenship for itself, for example, and the interaction of other communal sensibilities such as socialism and Christianity with the citizenship discourse was pinpointed as the source of radical citizenship in Poplar. Local politics cannot therefore simply be 'read off' from the local configuration of national social movements or institutions and their ideologies, as structuralist accounts suggest. The geographical configuration of communal sensibilities matters.

CHAPTER IV

'YOU KNEW IF YOU WERE IN NEED THERE WAS SOMEBODY':
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND POPLAR'S POLITICS

Chapter I described the virtually unanimous insistence of the literature on working-class politics that the workplace and waged labour are the primary forces shaping the political allegiance of working people. The following two chapters attempted to break this consensus by pointing firstly to the relative unimportance in Poplar's politics of both arguments about waged labour and of labour organisations, and, secondly, to the vigour of a politics which focussed not on the relationship of people to the means of production, but on their relationship to the state. These claims have had the effect of shifting the search for the causes of the borough's politics away from the workplace and towards the community and its institutions. Neither trade unions nor unofficial left-wing shopfloor movements, but local political groups, charities and social work centres have been presented as the arenas of political ideas and debate in Poplar.

However, this concern with life outside the workplaces has so far centred on formal institutions and organisations. This chapter turns instead to the political implications of an informal institution of Poplar, a fundamental one in which virtually every inhabitant of the borough was involved: the neighbourhood. Here too, the themes emerging from the previous chapters are sustained: the importance of politicisation processes and the diverse sources of Poplar Labour Party's politics.

Two theories of community and politics

There are two writers in particular who have broken with orthodox, workplace-centred theories of working-class politics: Raymond Williams, who has written on the importance of community to the success of political

organisations, and Jeremy Seabrook, who looks at the role of community in political ideas.

Williams focusses on the relationship between the social processes of community and working-class political organisation.¹ He argues that a political grouping is popular to the degree that it penetrates the social interstices of communities already bonded in other ways, and by bonding Williams means 'the institution and exercise of those relationships which are capable of maintaining the effective practice of social life as a whole' (p.166). He offers neighbourhood as one example of bonding. Thus to Williams, the social relations not of the workplace but of the community are crucial to the success of political movements. If these community bonds, these social processes, reinforce those of a political organisation, that organisation will be popular and well-supported.

Jeremy Seabrook has also argued that the community is more crucial to working-class politics than the factory or workshop, but for different reasons.² Seabrook is concerned not with the social relations of community but with its morality, and he asserts that this morality is the source of working-class socialism; he turns specifically to the working-class 'idea of neighbourhood', with its 'values which the best of the working class forged in opposition to the poverty and insecurity of capitalism -- the mutuality and the sharing, the sense of a collective predicament, the imaginative understanding of other people's sufferings' (p.22), and claims it as a paradigm of socialist politics. He argues that it was precisely this communal solidarity which lay behind all of Britain's most radical political movements in the past, and in a critique of current attacks on close-knit working-class communities he describes what he terms a:

1. R. Williams, Towards 2000 (London, 1983), especially pp.163-72.

2. J. Seabrook, The Idea of Neighbourhood: What Local Politics Should be About (London, 1984). Note however that Seabrook does not entirely ignore the world of paid work; he argues that the most tightly knit communities are those where one industry dominates the locality (p.143).

destructive tendency in contemporary life -- one that has been monitored for many years: a certain retreat from community, the faltering, in large sections of the working class, of commitment to collective values, the withering, not of outer forms, but of the very roots of solidarity itself. These things were always the motive and driving force of working-class institutions, the Labour Party and the trade unions, and formed the human basis for such impulses towards socialism as we have so far seen in this country, whether the growth of Chartism, the great organization of unskilled workers at the end of the nineteenth century, the General Strike or the election of 1945 (pp.3-4).³

In speaking of 'those older close-knit working-class communities ... out of which the great potential for change in the labour movement grew' (p.4), Seabrook argues that the values underlying working-class community life create a structural link between the working class and the Labour Party.

Two possible connections between the neighbourhood and socialist politics then are the social processes, or bonding, of the neighbourhood, and the values on which the social relations of neighbourhood life depend. Following the ideas of Geertz discussed in the first chapter however, it can be seen that although these two connections are analytically discrete, they cannot be prised apart when neighbourhoods are studied. Geertz would argue that the values of community, or the communal sensibility of the idea of neighbourhood, exist only insofar as they are expressed through social relations and bonding. The sensibility of neighbourhood mutuality is one of both culture and social organisation; in a Geertzian framework, the arguments of Williams and Seabrook complement one another.

Neither Williams's stress on the social relations of working-class communities nor Seabrook's emphasis on the ethics of those communities are new insights into the nature of the link between left-wing politics and community. Several of Poplar's most prominent Labour leaders also believed that the way of life of working-class

3. for similar arguments, see C. Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution (Oxford, 1982).

people was socialistic, both in its organisation and values. Although, as has been noted, Poplar Labour Party saw itself as 'the organisation of workers',⁴ the political meaning of the workers to men like George Lansbury and John Scurr lay not so much in the exploitation of their labour by the capitalist system as in the quality of workers' domestic lives, 'the traditional helpfulness of the poor for one another',⁵ their 'courage and kindness'.⁶ For as one of my informants said of her childhood in St Stephen's Road, Bow, in the 1920s, 'there was a sort of atmosphere there, you knew if you were in need there was somebody',⁷ and this collective solidarity and mutual aid, 'the splendid comradeship of the poor',⁸ this kindness and generosity of working-class people towards each other, was a major inspiration for Poplar's socialist politicians. As John Scurr explained, 'I will find more loving kindness in [an East End] slum than I will in a Hampstead drawing room'.⁹ And not only were working people seen to be morally superior to the inhabitants of Hampstead drawing rooms, they were also argued to be more practical; George Lansbury 'definitely ... believes that unsophisticated working men and women, faced with the absurdity of destitution among plenty, would go straight to the root of the matter and very soon devise ways and means of putting an end to the paradox'.¹⁰ Poplar Labour Party felt that simply to be among working-class people was to reinforce its socialism. 'George Lansbury has risen in his own way,

4. GLP, vol 30b, Bow and Bromley Labour Party leaflet, 1921?.

5. G. Lansbury, Looking Backwards -- and Forwards (London, 1935), p.134.

6. H.M. Tomlinson, A Mingled Yarn: Autobiographical Sketches (London, 1953), p.19.

7. interview with Mrs Sumner by the author, 2.6.1987.

8. G. Lansbury, My Life (London, 1928), p.287.

9. J. Scurr, 'The Future of Socialism', Socialist Review, 24 (1924), 83-87 (p.85).

10. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury. My Father (London, 1934), p.168.

but he has never allowed anything to come between him and the masses to whom he belongs, amongst whom he lives, and who are his inspiration', said his son.¹¹

This belief in the innate socialism of the working class had to be reconciled with the electoral weakness of Labour in places other than Poplar, and Poplar politicians achieved this by pointing to the successful efforts of those 'who strive to divide and distract [the working class] by mere words'.¹² Thus although their own enthusiasm for political education, for the removal of false divisions and distractions, was described in chapters II and III as part of their commitment to democracy, it clearly depended too on their conviction that working people were naturally socialist; once correctly educated, they would vote Labour.¹³

This chapter therefore pursues the relationship between polity and community in some detail, exploring the social relations and morality of working-class neighbourhoods in Poplar and their relationship to the borough's politics. The first section argues that Poplar Labour Party did indeed draw much political sustenance in various ways from the neighbourhood life of the borough; the communal sensibility of neighbourhood sustained the politics of the Party which the chapters on class and citizenship have outlined. But the second and third sections problematise both the political implications of community and the nature of community itself, and thus suggest that the relationship between the Party and the streets was in no sense as inevitable and determining as Seabrook in particular implies. It was not a structural

11. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father, p.19.

12. Lansbury, My Life, p.288.

13. This is a conviction shared by certain locality-study writers of course; see S.S. Duncan and M. Goodwin, 'The Local State and Restructuring Social Relations: Theory and Practice', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 157-86; D. Byrne, 'Class and the Local State', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 61-82. However, these authors explain support for Labour in terms of the working-class relationship to the means of production, not by the socialistic way of life of working-class people.

but a complex and, above all, a constructed connection, and the significance of its construction will be examined in the concluding section.

But to begin with, an account of the landscape of Poplar's neighbourhoods, of the spaces through which community life flowed.

The landscape of neighbourhood

Poplar's landscape in the 1920s faithfully reflected its social and economic past and present. What most impressed people describing the district in the 1920s were the enormous docks and warehouses upon which the development of the borough in the nineteenth century had depended. 'Plainly related to a vaster world',¹⁴ they symbolised Poplar's links with the colonial economic system; in the rather more romantic words of one author, 'here, at this grey spot, is the ultimate end of many golden journeys to Samarkand'.¹⁵

You can see the water and the funnels; you can smell the tar and the pepper, the cinammon and the aniseed, the nutmeg and the almond; you can hear the conversation of ship's bells and hooters, and so heavily is the air weighted with the tar and the spice, your tongue can catch their flavour.¹⁶

But surrounding the docks and interrupted only by churches and mission halls, factories and warehouses, cranes and ships' masts, were rows upon rows of terraces, 'deadly monotonous' even to those who lived in them,¹⁷

rows of little one-storied houses standing a few feet back from the pavement behind iron railings, of an obvious humility, but decent and showing all the marks of that patient industry with which the London poor tend their homes. The small sterile space between the railings and the houses was at least tidy; the windows were clean; an aspidistra invariably showed between the parted curtains of

14. H.M. Tomlinson, London River (London, 1921), p.18.

15. T. Burke and P. Binder, The Real East End (London, 1932), p.99.

16. Burke and Binder, The Real East End, p.90.

17. E.M. Page, 'No Green Pastures I', East London Papers 9 (1966), 27-40 (p.27).

the parlour windows; and it was clear from the way the brass number-plates on the doors glittered that the women inside had a commendable enthusiasm for anything that could be made to shine.¹⁸

A less sympathetic observer described Poplar as a 'squalid, arid expanse [of] pigmy, verminous houses';¹⁹ the district was indeed 'a borough of mean streets'.²⁰

Housing conditions could be appalling in Poplar, particularly on the Isle of Dogs where many houses were built below the water level and were extremely damp as a result; even after the council's efforts in the 1920s it was estimated in 1933 that one family in four in the borough needed rehousing in decent accommodation.²¹ Added to these environmental difficulties, houses were usually sub-let by tenants eager to increase their income and this meant that overcrowding was also a major problem. The Census found 21.2 per cent of people in 1921 and 20.1 per cent ten years later living two or more to a room in Poplar, while the London mean had fallen from 16.1 to 13.1 per cent over the same period. These conditions were maintained by the poverty of Poplar people; about a quarter of families simply could not afford to rent decent accommodation.²²

Although there were some middle-class families in Poplar, particularly along Bow Road,²³ the borough in the 1920s was the poorest in the metropolis. As previously noted, the New Survey of London Life and Labour found that no less than 24.1 per cent of the population were living below its harsh poverty line at the end of the decade, and a mere 2.5 per cent of were middle class.²⁴ In 1930 an average household budget of forty-five shillings a week

18. H. Thorogood, East of Aldgate (London, 1935), p.11.

19. M. Lester, Kill or Cure? (Nashville, 1937), p.11.

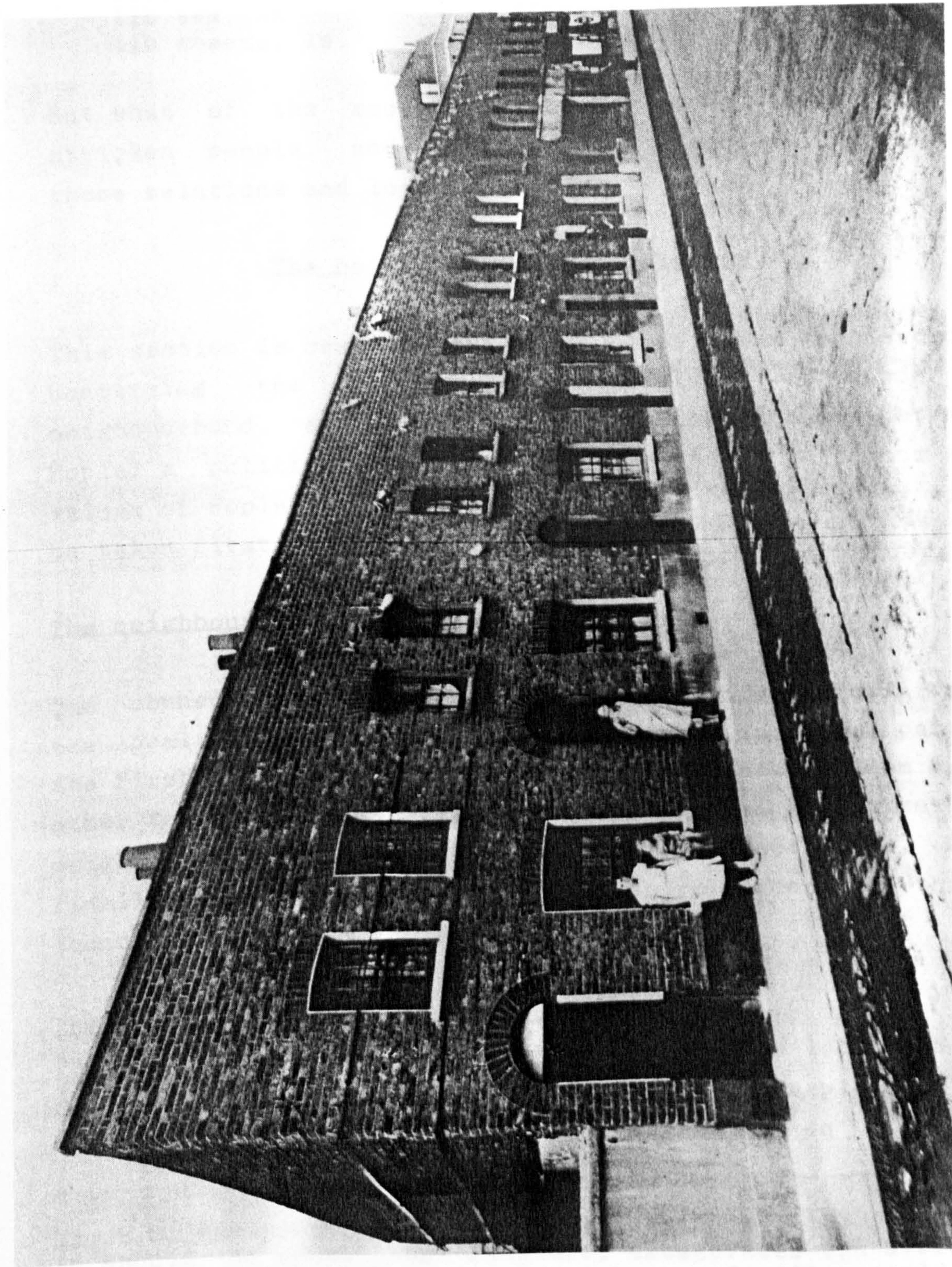
20. W.H. Lax, Lax of Poplar: The Story of a Wonderful Quarter of a Century (London, 1927), p.54.

21. East End News, 3.11.1933.

22. East End News, 3.11.1933.

23. New Survey, IV, map 2.

24. New Survey III, p.368.



A poor Poplar street: Maroon Street, 1936

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

which this level of poverty implied looked something like this:²⁵

rent, 12s. 6d.	insurance, 1s.
coal, 2s. 4d.	tallyman, 1s.
gas, 1s. 6d.	loan club, 1s.
milk, 1s. 5d.	soap, 7d.
flour, 6d.	4lb sugar, 10d.
1lb tea, 2s.	dinners, 10s. 6d.
1lb cheese, 1s.	canned meat, 1s.

But what of the social relations among these poverty-stricken people, and what were the connections between those relations and local politics?

The neighbourhood and politics

This section is based on the ideas of Williams and Seabrook concerning the political implications of bonds of neighbourhood, and it explores the connections between Poplar's political parties and the social relations and values of Poplar's neighbourhoods. The Labour Party will be taken first.

The neighbourhood and Poplar Labour Party

The connections between neighbourhood life in Poplar and the local Labour Party will be considered in three parts, the first two of which are artificially separated from each other for expositional clarity: the social relations of neighbourhoods, the ethic of neighbourhood life, and finally the processes by which these relations and ethics found expression in Poplar Labour Party.

The social relations of neighbourhoods

This sub-section examines the insertion of the local Labour Party into the bonds of community. But in exploring the causes and nature of social relations in Poplar's

25. E.S. Pankhurst, Save the Mothers (London, 1930), p.23. It should be noted that Pankhurst exaggerates the average level of poverty in Poplar, although many families would be struggling with this budget; the New Survey estimated that an average rent was 9s.4d. and the average income was from 72s. to 75s. a week in the borough: New Survey III, p.367.

neighbourhoods, it also provides evidence for the claim made in chapter II that the sources of Poplar workers' exuberance were to be found in their domestic lives.

The crowded homes and streets of the locality meant that neighbours were an unavoidable part of life for Poplar's inhabitants. 'If a person lived here on Millwall, I would know him and they'd know me. Go to the shops, good morning, you'd know 'em like';²⁶ neighbours were encountered in corner shops, in pubs and backyards, on landings and stairways. Many of my interviewees when talking of their childhood in the Poplar of sixty years ago could recall each family in their street and took much pleasure in enumerating their names, occupations, histories and eccentricities; the significance of the neighbourhood's residents must have been very great for such details to resonate in its inhabitants' memories for so many years. But these neighbourhoods were carefully demarcated; interviewees defined their neighbourhoods very clearly, listing the three or four streets of which they were composed with precision.

Poplar Labour Party utilised this strong territorial sense and based its organisation on these neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood was allocated its own collector by the Party, often the young son of a councillor, and that collector would visit each house in each street every week to collect the 1d. Party membership subscriptions; each street produced about 2s.6d. for the Party's funds.²⁷ In 1922, George Lansbury attributed his success in the general election to the intensive canvassing done in their neighbourhoods by the six hundred members of Bow and Bromley Labour Party's Women's Section.²⁸ The Party was thus closely involved in neighbourhood life, and this penetration must account in part for its unusually high level of individual membership; in 1923, South Poplar

26. IHT, interview with Mr Emms, no date.

27. interview with Mr Barker by the author, 22.6.1987.

28. East London Advertiser, 25.11.1922.

constituency had the largest number of individual members of any London constituency.²⁹

Close knowledge of neighbours was not caused solely by the crowded streets and the virtual impossibility of privacy; it was also encouraged by the close proximity of family and kin, for 'there was nearly always relatives near, and families weren't scattered'.³⁰ At the end of the 1920s, 80.8 per cent of Poplar's heads of households had been born in London, 38.8 per cent of them in Poplar itself and another 13.7 per cent in adjacent East End boroughs.³¹ The networks of families were especially dense and complex on the Isle of Dogs, which was often cut off from the rest of Poplar borough by the frequency with which the bridges over docks canals which connected it to the mainland were raised.³² Here are two Islanders speaking:

[My husband] lived next door to me from a child, and of course then he moved across the road and of course when my dad married again his wife was my husband's father's sister. She was his sister see, it made my step-mother his aunt.³³

It turned out that [a new neighbour's] niece was our grandson's godmother and her nephew had married our niece and this is the sort of thing that's happening all the time.³⁴

Clearly this family-based sociability contained the seeds of its own survival; marriage partners very often came from the same street, or perhaps one nearby, as the table on the following page shows.

29. Labour Party Annual Report 1923, p.228, quoted in R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24 (Oxford, 1974), p.142. South Poplar had over two thousand individual members.

30. interview with Mrs Sumner.

31. New Survey, HCS.

32. T.J. Cole, 'Life and Labour on the Isle of Dogs: The Origins and Evolution of an East End Working-Class Community 1800-1980', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1984); E. Hostettler, 'A Dockland Community -- the Isle of Dogs', in Dockland: An Illustrated Historical Survey of Life and Work in East London, edited by R.J.M. Carr, (London, 1986), pp.59-70.

33. IHT, interview with Mrs Garland, no date.

34. IHT, interview with Mr and Mrs Price, 11.11.1980.

TABLE 7

RESIDENCE OF MARRIAGE PARTNERS
IN TWO POPLAR PARISHES 1919-29

percentage of marriages between partners:

	living in same street	living in same parish	one partner living outside parish
All Hallows, Bromley-by-Bow			
1919	38.1	27.9	32.6
1921	56.7	24.3	18.9
1923	42.1	28.9	28.9
1925	58.4	22.2	19.4
1927	53.8	36.6	9.8
1929	58.9	30.6	10.7
1919-29	51.3	28.4	20.1
St Stephen's, Bow			
1919	38.0	22.7	28.0
1921	40.4	19.0	38.0
1923	39.8	23.1	37.2
1925	45.2	19.2	35.6
1927	40.6	28.4	31.1
1929	39.1	26.1	35.8
1919-29	42.2	23.1	34.4

All marriages in each of the sample years have been tabulated. The total number at All Hallows in the six years was 276 and that at St Stephen's, 448.

Source: GLRO, parish registers of All Hallows, Bromley-by-Bow, and St Stephen's, Bow.

Then of course there were the local schools, which seem to have been especially important in building networks of acquaintances.

The wife and I sit now, and we can go through every street in Millwall and we know everybody, or we knew everybody, all their names. Because you used to go to school with 'em.³⁵

These local networks of acquaintances and friends made sociability an almost inevitable part of living in Poplar; indeed social loners were labelled 'queer' by their more gregarious neighbours.³⁶

This sociability was both reflected and reinforced by several institutions in the borough the main purpose of which was conviviality. Some have already been mentioned: settlement clubs, for example. Pubs were social centres, especially for men, and pub 'beanos' were exuberant occasions:

Mum never went to a pub ... but we always went up to the Vic to see them all set out on their yearly outing. They were already laughing and shouting rude things even before the charabanc set off for Southend, but they didn't wear cloth caps and coarse aprons then. 'Done up to the nines', Mum would say.³⁷

There were two workingmen's clubs in the borough, where you 'put your right arm forth'.³⁸ Even funerals were enjoyable occasions; 'there was plenty of drink and it was more of a day out'.³⁹

Conviviality thus appears to have been a crucial aspect of Poplar's culture, a part of its neighbourhood communal

35. IHT, interview with Mr Neeshaw, no date.

36. W. Goldman, East End My Cradle new edition (London, 1947), p.150.

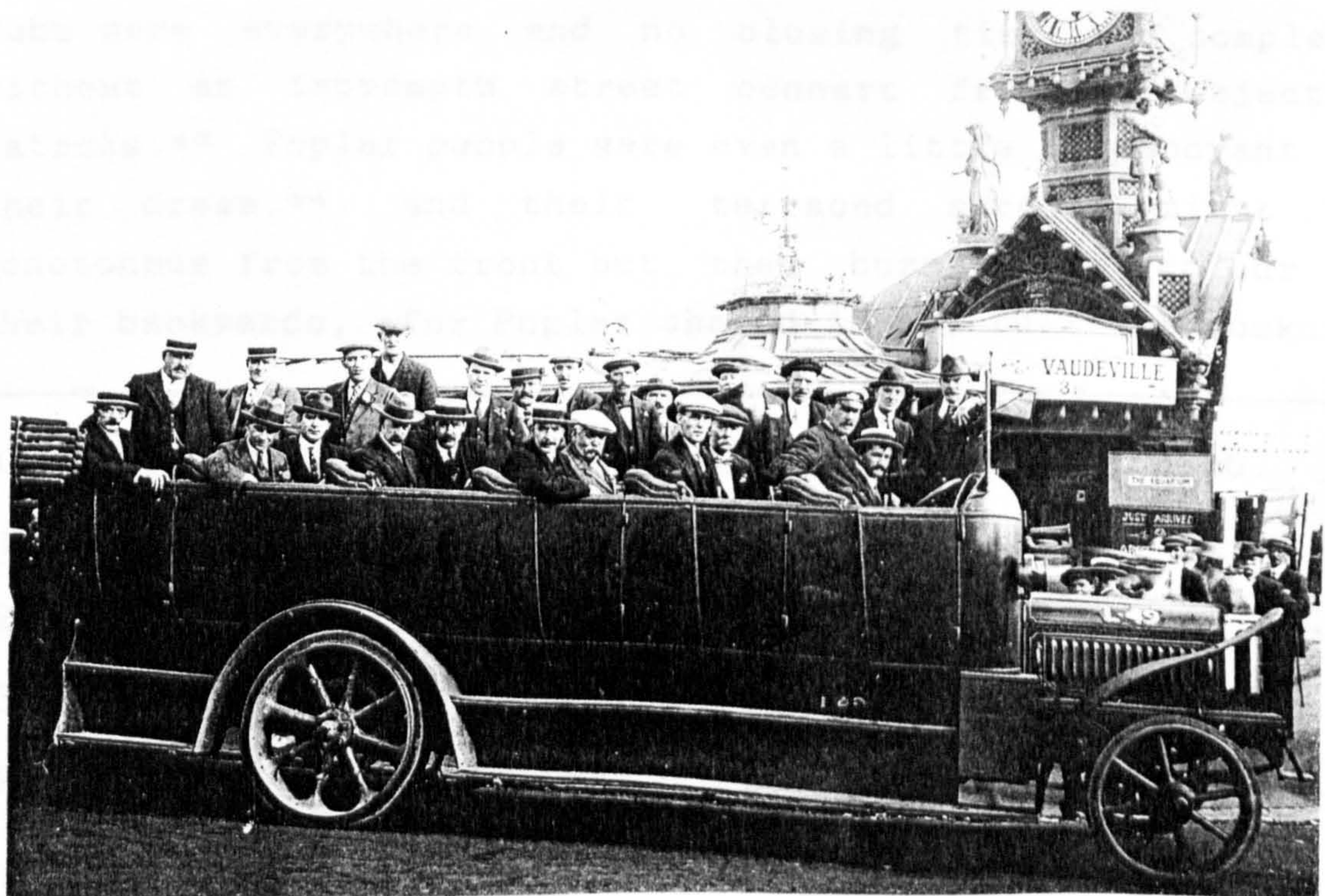
37. D. Bailey, Children of the Green: A True Story of Childhood in Bethnal Green 1922-37 (London, 1981), pp.42-3. For an account of a high-spirited outing from a Bow Wesleyan chapel's women's meeting, see W.E. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow (London, 1938), pp.95-6.

38. The phrase means drink: interview with Mr Shed in Fly a Flag for Poplar, edited by G. Richman (London, 1975), pp.27-30 (p.30); GLP, vol 9, letters from Poplar Working Men's Club, 26.2.1929, and Bow Working Men's Club, 5.3.1929.

39. interview with Mr Boer in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.72-76 (p.72).

Two 'beanos' from Isle of Dogs pubs in the 1920s

Source: Island History Trust



sensibility, and certainly the friendliness of the people was a common theme of writers describing Poplar. In particular they were struck by good nature and high spirits of local people. A popular local minister described the inhabitants':

kindly outlook on life. Probably this can be accounted for by the peculiar personality that Poplar has developed for itself. For surely a city possesses its own personality as definitely as does a man! In spite of its poverty, its discomforts and its limitations, this restless, vivid and many-coloured life dazzles and stimulates one with extraordinary power. It is so instructive, so amusing, so alive, that you look on fascinated and held in its grip. And, of course, you know how original Poplar is in every expression of its virile personality.⁴⁰

This virility was expressed in the boisterous character of the people, 'their rich vitality and gusto for living'.⁴¹ East Enders filled their drab environment with life and colour; here are the first impressions of a minister newly arrived in Poplar in 1921:

Streets crowded with children, many pitiably clad and obviously undernourished; the glaring public houses full, noisy, evil-smelling ... Sunday nights especially shocked us, for we were only familiar with provincial towns and villages. Cinemas, dance-halls, boxing rings -- all open, their flaming lights attracting youths promenading on the crowded pavements.⁴²

Pubs were everywhere and no closing time was complete without an impromptu street concert from the ejected patrons.⁴³ Poplar people were even a little flamboyant in their dress,⁴⁴ and their terraced streets might be monotonous from the front but they burst into colour in their backyards, for Poplar shared to the full the cockney

40. W.H. Lax, Let's Go To Poplar! (London, 1929), p.36.

41. Burke and Binder, The Real East End, p.11.

42. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.19.

43. interview with Mrs Sumner.

44. J. Blake, Memories of Old Poplar (London, 1977), p.23.

love of flowers, and houses were full of decorations and knick-knacks, vulgar and brightly tinted.⁴⁵

This exuberance went hand in hand with a keen sense of humour. Here is a visitor to a typical Poplar house:

There is little plaster on the ceiling; the lathes can be seen.

'Does the rain come through?' we ask.

'Not 'arf it doesn't neither,' Mrs. Botter tells us, for some strange reason all smiles.

'One night, soon arter we came 'ere, I woke up dreamin' I was drownin'. "George", I sez to 'im, pointing to her husband, "save me, I'm drownin' going dahn for the third time." "Nonsense," he sez, "it's only the rain," and wiv that I woke up and, blimey, 'e was right, the rain was pouring in and there was me wiv me mouf all open gettin' it all. Some 'ouse, strike me it ain't!' ...

'Have you any rats, Mrs. Botter?'

'Rats? Yes, and lots o' mice,' and Mrs. Botter chuckles to herself. 'One night I woke up. "George," I sez, "wot's that? It's burglars, I'm sure!" "Burglars," 'e sez, "burglars 'ere, you're an optimist, ain't yer? It's mice. They're 'avin' a football match wiv the kid's ball!"⁴⁶

At least one commentator felt that this wry humour was a result of Poplar's poverty. Having grown up in Poplar in the years before the Great War, H.M. Tomlinson in his memoirs asked rhetorically,

What is a Cockney? ... He has worked for two thousand years, and still works, so he does not expect much ... the gods have upset his apple-barrow too often ... Things have so often gone awry for him, notwithstanding the laws and the prophets, that it has ceased to be amusing, but this has given him patience, and his philosophy a bleak humour.⁴⁷

Whatever its cause, this 'joie de vivre', as a local magistrate called it,⁴⁸ was part of living in Poplar;

45. M. Lester, It Occurred to Me (London, 1937), p.22; SPP, file 241.

46. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.58-9.

47. Tomlinson, A Mingled Yarn, p.82. The image of the poor but chirpy Cockney is presented fully in J. Franklyn, The Cockney: A Survey of London Life and Language (London, 1953); see also L. Heren, Growing Up Poor in London (London, 1973). For critical consideration of the image and a discussion of its political implications, see G. Stedman Jones, 'Invention and Tradition: The Case of the London Cockney 1780-1980', paper presented at the Institute of Historical Research, February 1987.

48. J.A.R. Cairns, Drab Street Glory (London, 1934), p.218.

chapter II charted its impact on workplaces in the borough and Poplar Labour Party drew upon it too.'

It did so for example in the Mayday processions it organised; council vehicles would be decorated and a procession with banners march to Hyde Park for a rally; 'it was a good day out'.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most important way in which the Party integrated itself into Poplar's conviviality however was through the PWLG. The PWLG seems to have started life as the Women's Section of South Poplar's constituency Labour Party with Nellie Cressall as its secretary, but initially it was unsuccessful. Only in the early 1920s, when Mrs Maude Barker took over the secretaryship, did its fortunes revive, and it then appears to have split from the Party and become an independent body. It met every Wednesday night at Poplar Town Hall, nominally to hear a Labour speaker but, judging from the account of its proceedings offered by Maude Barker's son, the real interest was in the tea, cakes and 'turns' on the stage by himself and his uncle Ern which followed the talk. 'We had a really enjoyable time', he remembers; about three hundred people attended each meeting, 'a real good old turnout'. One councillor especially involved in the PWLG was Charlie Tanner who ran a pie and eel shop in Chrisp Street, Poplar's main market. He was 'a real lad, you know what I mean, and course bein' in Chris' Street market 'e knew everybody'.⁵⁰

As well as the pubs and clubs in Poplar which existed simply to provide sociable meeting places, several local societies catered for hobbies like gardening and pigeon-fancying and other sports,⁵¹ and the Labour Party was also

49. interview with Mr Barker.

50. The source of all information on the Poplar Women's Labour Guild is the author's interview with Mr Barker. Joe Barker is the son of the secretary of the Guild from the mid-1920s, Maude Barker.

51. For example the Bow and Bromley Garden Guild, the Millwall and Cubitt Town Garden Guild, the East London Federation Pigeon Racing Club, Poplar Bowling Club and the Victoria Park Lawn Tennis Association: East London Advertiser, 2.6.1928; THLHL, Poplar Hospital for Accidents, Annual Report 1922 (Poplar, 1922), p.52; Mr Mayer

involved in these more organised activities. There was an East London Labour Orchestra which played at WSF meetings in the early 1920s,⁵² and a Borough of Poplar and East London Labour Football League with George Lansbury and another longstanding Poplar Labour councillor, Alf Partridge, as its presidents.⁵³

The local Labour Party was inserted into the social bonding of Poplar in two ways then: through its close contact with neighbourhoods and through its organisations which expressed the gregariousness of Poplar's sociability. As Williams argues, this must have helped the Party to win local support; it was part of the social life of the locality.

The idea of neighbourhood

A more diffuse, but nonetheless real, connection between the neighbourhood and Poplar's support for the Labour Party was the way in which the Party's policies reflected the ethic underlying the mutual aid networks among neighbours. George Lansbury believed that socialism itself was but an expression of the will among working-class people to help each other:

I am often quite amazed at the downright pleasure which poor people find in helping each other, and how often a real sharing of pleasure is indulged in ... If only all of us cultivated the desire, which is in all of us, to be kind and generous to each other, we should soon create a Socialist England.⁵⁴

This moral desire was the ethical imperative of neighbourhood life, and its impact on the Party will now be examined.

This ethic was embodied -- or, to use Geertz's term, envehicled -- in the networks of mutual aid and support

interviewed in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, p.48; THLHL, Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund, Annual Report 1922 (Poplar, 1922), unpaginated; East London Advertiser, 18.5.1929. Mr Stothard, interviewed by the author 25.7.1986, mentions a pigeon-fanciers club in Blackwall.

52. Workers' Dreadnought, 14.2.1920.

53. GLP, vol 10, letter from the League, 20.2.1931.

54. G. Lansbury, My England (London, 1934), p.225.

which flourished among inhabitants of all poor working-class districts. These networks were a strategy for coping with low and unpredictable incomes; desperate poverty was alleviated somewhat by the pooling of household resources, and this has led Ross to describe them as 'survival networks'.⁵⁵ The key to the success of survival networks was the reciprocity which underlay them. This reciprocity had two aspects. Food and other goods (and sometimes money) were lent firstly with confidence in their return as soon as it was possible, and secondly in the knowledge that the woman able to lend today might be the woman needing to borrow tomorrow and that lending bestowed the right to borrow. As one of my informants said of Poplar in the 1920s, 'it was a time when everybody helped everybody and I know for a fact my mother's given away her last cup of sugar and she's said, "oh it'll come back," and it always did.'⁵⁶ Since they concerned the domestic arena, survival networks were enacted by women, but the impulse to be neighbourly was not confined to women alone; men shared it too. Neighbourliness was a truly communal sensibility.

But the material benefits of mutuality do not entirely explain the neighbourhood ethic. The ethic of sharing and helping was powerful in its own right because it was felt that sharing was the correct thing to do. Neighbours' kindness and generosity was seen in moral terms, not calculative ones; 'people were good, people were very good', as one interviewee described them;⁵⁷ this was the desire 'to be kind and generous' of which Lansbury spoke.

Examples of sharing among neighbours could be multiplied endlessly; 'there was a great feeling of helping'.⁵⁸ Women helped each other at childbirth; 'women did in those days, to the woman next door or up the street.

55. E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War One', History Workshop Journal, 15 (1983), 4-27.

56. interview with Mr Barker.

57. interview with Mr Franklin by the author, 22.6.1987.

58. interview with Miss Whiffin in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.58-61 (p.59).

Sometimes it was near enough born, she had 'em in the world before the midwife came'.⁵⁹ Children from poorer families were fed with bread and butter doorsteps by other mothers, children ran errands for neighbours, collections were made for children's funerals.

Monday morning, which was always wash day, one of them would come out ... 'let's have a squeeze of your blue'. You used it to rinse your clothes to give them that whiteness. Or the other would come out and ask for some pegs. If a person was ill, even if you hadn't spoken to them for months, you'd go round ... 'course the door was always open. 'What's the matter girl?' 'I don't know', 'Well let's wash these up for you, seen the doctor?' 'Can't afford the doctor'. It cost 1/- for a visit then. So they'd have a whip round of perhaps half a dozen neighbours.⁶⁰

Information was also shared among neighbours. 'To demonstrate on each other's walls rival methods of delousing creates a bond of helpfulness that lasts',⁶¹ it was claimed, and the map overleaf shows the addresses of women who came to Sylvia Pankhurst's office in Old Ford Road to ask her help with pensions and such like during the First World War. It clearly shows a clustering in just a few roads, and represents women telling their neighbours about Sylvia and her readiness to help them.

Men and women in Poplar found jobs through the same local information networks, being told of a vacancy at the workplace of a neighbour or relative then going there in person to apply to the foreman for the job.⁶² The result was that in most workplaces, friends and relations were working together; as chapter I noted, about two thirds of Poplar's population over the age of twelve both lived and worked in the borough.⁶³ One of my informants told me how

59. interview with Mrs Henman in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.50-53 (p.50).

60. interview with Mr French in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.105-08 (p.106).

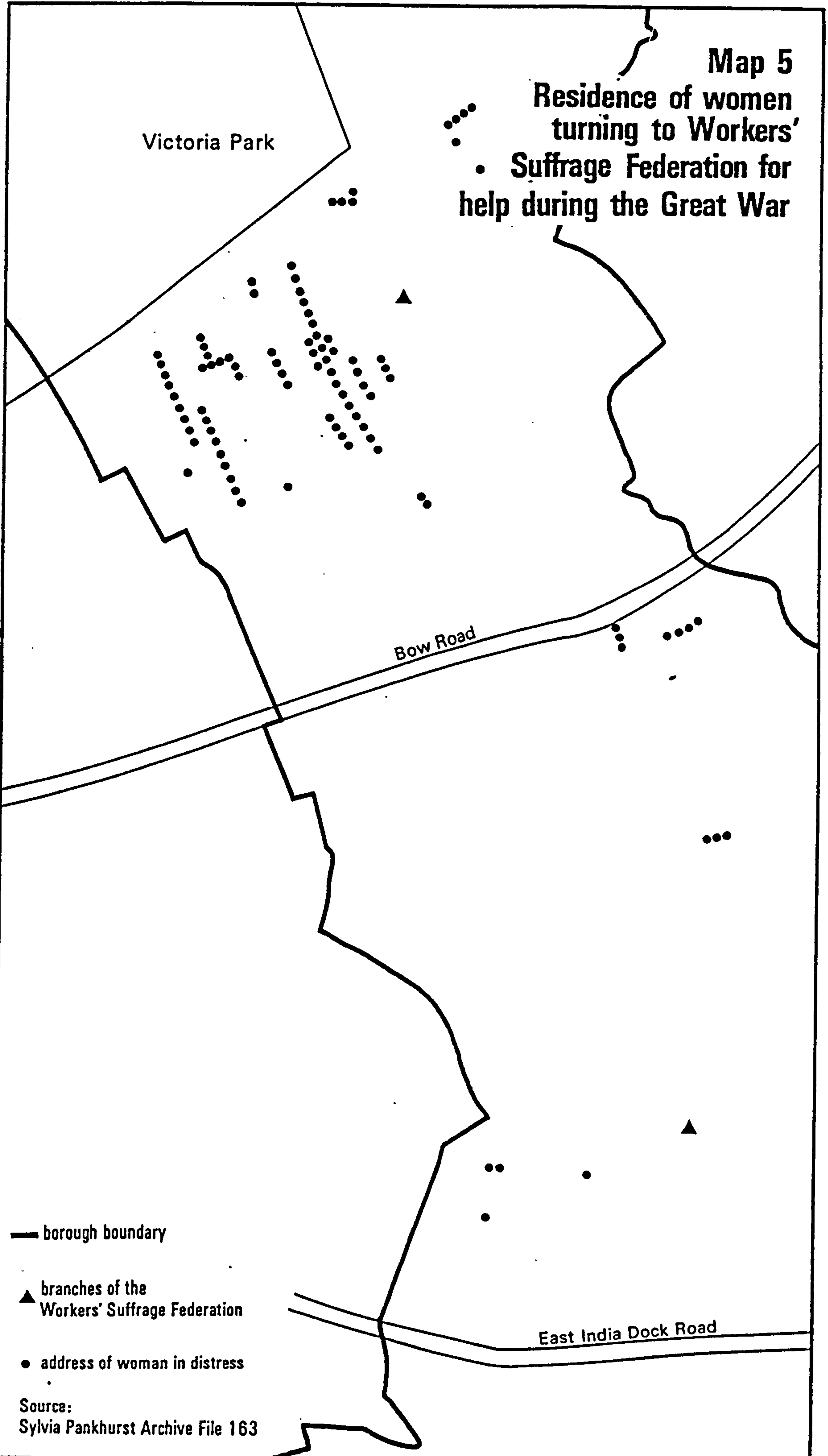
61. Lester, It Occurred to Me, p.46.

62. My interviewees were unanimous on this point.

63. London County Council, Census 1921: Report upon the Statistics relating to Greater London contained in the various Volumes of the Census of England and Wales, 1921

Map 5

**Residence of women
turning to Workers'
Suffrage Federation for
help during the Great War**



— borough boundary

▲ branches of the
Workers' Suffrage Federation

● address of woman in distress

Source:
Sylvia Pankhurst Archive File 163

his father, who worked in a chemical factory in Old Ford, managed to know so many of his neighbours.

He sort of -- nearly everyone he passed, he knew them by their Christian name, because, y'know, 'e either worked with 'em, because there was about seven hundred and fifty men worked at this one factory and they all lived thereabouts, within walking distance see, and 'e'd been to school in the school opposite and he knew their Christian names and in many cases the Christian name of their wives.⁶⁴

This community solidarity in the workplace helps to explain the frequency of strikes in Poplar for the reinstatement of fellow-workers felt to be wrongly dismissed all through the 1920s (see Table 4). The bonds of neighbourhood also operated within trade union branches, which, as noted before, were based not on workplace but on residence.⁶⁵ This was especially so in Poplar, for although the locality's union branches often held popular and successful branch socials to raise money for charity or to honour a local official, there is no record in the trade unions' journals of them participating in any London-wide sociable union activities. Poplar's trade union branches seem to have been based more on community than on trade.

The politics of Poplar Labour Party were imbricated in the bonding and ethic of neighbourhood life too. Poplar Labour Party 'refuses to treat poverty as a crime, and paupers as criminals',⁶⁶ and this belief in relief and unemployment relief works as a right clearly reflects the neighbourly morality of helping those in need, reinforcing the socialist arguments for statist welfare examined in chapter II. Seabrook appears correct in his argument that the idea of neighbourhood was a paradigm of socialist politics.

(London, 1928), pp.28-9.

64. interview with Mr. Sumner by the author, 2.6.1987.

65. G.D.H. Cole, Organised Labour: An Introduction to Trade Unionism (London, 1924), p.24.

66. PMBC, Guilty and Proud of It: Poplar's Answer (Poplar, 1922), p.3. This pamphlet was a reply to a Ministry of Health inquiry into Poplar Board of Guardians' relief policy.

But how did Poplar's neighbourhood ethic find its way into Poplar Labour Party's manifestoes and policies?

A connection between neighbourhood and Party

One link between Poplar's communal sensibility of neighbourhood and its Labour Party was the type of people who became local councillors and Guardians. This subsection examines that claim, and then explores its implications for the style of the Party's politics and for its local support. (Another connection between Party and neighbourhood -- political propaganda -- is examined in a later section.)

Poplar's elected representatives were themselves working-class men and women for whom the conviviality and mutual aid of neighbourhood life was part of their lifeblood. The table on the next page shows their occupations. As it demonstrates, the people who became Poplar's elected representatives were usually manual workers, and many of those who held non-manual jobs were trade union officials who had once been on the shop floor. George Lansbury's son said of him that 'his really intimate friends are among the poor'.⁶⁷ Poplar's politicians knew from their own experience the poverty many people faced, the struggle to feed and clothe large families, the strategies of working-class life which had developed to ease this struggle. George Lansbury, for example, felt 'a complete understanding, an almost physical sense of unity with the working-class',⁶⁸ and this working-class socialisation found expression in his politics and those of his fellow Labour activists. This sense that their politics flowed from their way of looking at the world is expressed in the outraged reaction of Alf Watts, a councillor and Guardian, to the suggestion of a minion at the Ministry of Health that Poplar's Guardians were guilty of extravagance:

67. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury. My Father, p.17.

68. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, pp.32-3.

TABLE 8
OCCUPATIONS OF POPLAR'S GUARDIANS AND COUNCILLORS 1919-29

	number of Guardians and councillors	
	Labour Party	PBMA
skilled manual	10	1
semi-skilled manual	12	0
unskilled manual	7	0
total manual workers	29	1
full-time Labour Party or trade union official	9	0
other non-manual	13	2
owner of business	3	11
rentier income	1	0
total non-manual workers	26	13
women	9	1
other unknown	6	0
total unknown	15	1

A total of 86 people served Poplar for three or more years as councillors or Guardians between 1919 and 1929, and all but one are listed in this table. The exception is a man whose party affiliation and occupation cannot be ascertained. Women's occupations did not have to be recorded when they registered as candidates.

Sources: J.M. Bellamy and J. Saville, Dictionary of Labour Biography, vol 1- (London, 1972-); N. Branson, Poplarism 1919-1925: George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt, (London, 1979); East London Advertiser *passim*; THLHL biographical press cuttings collection.

We are working men. We are not extravagant. All our lives we are economical; I have never been extravagant in my life.⁶⁹

To be a typical working person imbued with the communal sensibilities of working-class life was qualification enough for Poplar Labour Party's socialism.

But Poplar's councillors and Guardians were not just working-class; they were also East Enders. The vast majority of Poplar's councillors and Guardians had grown up in Poplar and all lived in the borough while they held office, very often in the ward which they represented in the council chamber or on the Board. The map on the next page demonstrates this.

The local residence of its activists had marked effects on the style of Poplar Labour Party. Their radicalism was reinforced by their intimate knowledge of the borough's poverty, for example. Constant reminders of Poplar's deprivation increased their determination to agitate for change and reform. George Lansbury's anger against tight-fisted Ministry of Health policies was fuelled by the evidence among Poplar's schoolchildren of two stunted and diseased generations corresponding to the ministries of Mond and Chamberlain,⁷⁰ and Muriel Lester explained the council's commitment to free milk for needy families by saying:

ours is the only Maternity and Child Welfare Committee composed wholly of people who themselves live down the same streets and alleys as the children. We can see them every day. We should have to watch them growing pale and thin and weak if the milk grant were to be lowered.⁷¹

John Scurr is perhaps the most eloquent on the radicalising effect of the lived experience of Poplar's poverty on the locality's political activists:

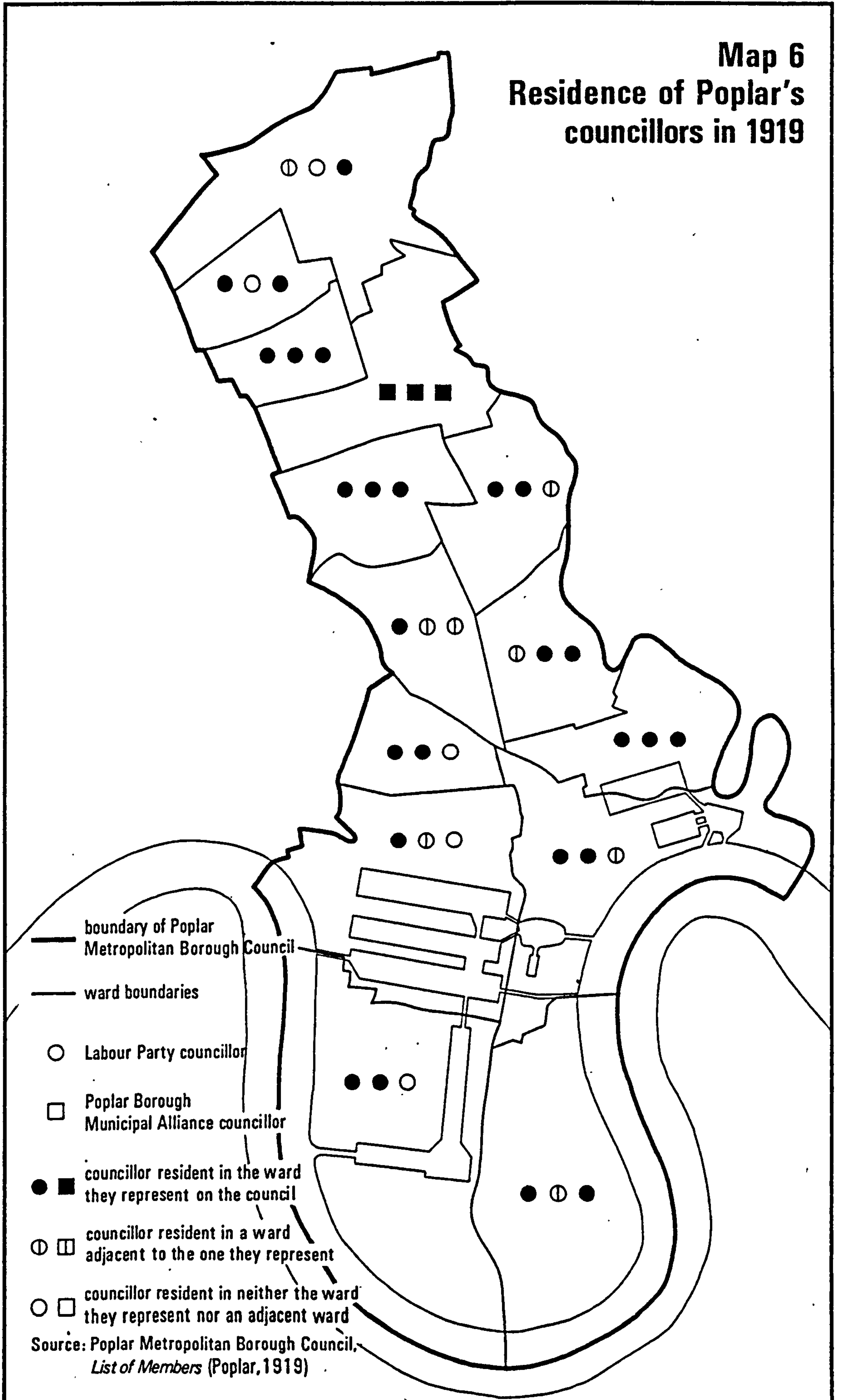
I have lived all my life in the East End of London, and I know the lives of the very poor. It is this that makes me a Socialist. Cramped together under overcrowded conditions in dark mean streets and

69. PRO, MH68/215, report of a deputation of Poplar Guardians to the Ministry of Health, 20.6.1922.

70. R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London, 1951), p.241.

71. Lester, It Occurred to Me, p.100.

Map 6
Residence of Poplar's
councillors in 1919



alleys; overworked at miserable wages; seldom able to buy a new dress or a new suit of clothes; content to purchase cast-offs in the pawnshop or on the stall in the street market; subject to disease from conditions of work and conditions of living. What chance have they or their children? They have been cast into the abyss of ignorance, and our society passes them by and abuses them for their dirt and their ignorance which our social system has thrust upon them.⁷²

Another effect of living locally was to impart some of Poplar's high spirits and rowdiness to the actions of Poplar Labour Party; the character of Poplar people spilled into their politics. Singing, for example, was a major part of Poplar's exuberant sociability and 'the roar and stamp of "Knees up Mother Brown" pouring out of a pub on a Friday night' routine;⁷³ singing was also important to George Lansbury and to the Party, for no political meeting was complete without a rousing chorus of the 'Red Flag' or the 'Internationale'.⁷⁴ And here is the chair at a meeting held by Bow's Conservative candidate in the 1929 general election trying to keep order:

It is rather difficult to make a speech if one's standing with the audience is prejudged. (Loud cries of 'Murderer') ... it may be that the dominance of a small group of politicians, supported by an intimidating and noisy crowd is on the wane. (Much disturbance) ... I have greater confidence than ever in advising the electors of Bow and Bromley to vote for a candidate so balanced, so steady and so able as Mr Goodman. (Confused singing at the back of the hall, and vigorous clapping at the front).⁷⁵

This belligerence surfaced even in the official pronouncements of Poplar Labour Party. Its reply to the Ministry of Health's inquiry into its administration of the Poor Law was entitled Guilty and Proud of It; hardly a conciliatory gesture, but one absolutely typical of Poplar Labour Party and Poplar people.

If the councillors and Guardians of Poplar were the embodiment of the values of Poplar's culture, their

72. Scurr, 'The Future of Socialism', p.85.

73. Heren, Growing Up Poor in London, p.26.

74. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father, pp.99-115.

75. East London Advertiser, 18.5.1929.

politics which flowed from those values would appeal especially to Poplar people. The argument of Shils concerning the nature of charisma, mentioned in Chapter I, should be recalled here. Shils argued that charismatic individuals are so because they 'have attained contact with [a] "vital layer" of reality',⁷⁶ a layer in which 'certain vital, crucial qualities are manifested' (p.201). This notion that massively popular individuals gain such status because they embody values central to a culture is not new; it was applied to a Poplar politician before the Great War. The introduction to a biography of Will Crooks who, like Lansbury, 'has deliberately chosen to remain in the ranks of working men',⁷⁷ described working-class politicians as 'fanatics for the things about which the people are good-humouredly convinced ... philosophers about the things which are to the people an easy and commonplace religion',⁷⁸ and in this sense charismatic is without doubt an appropriate term to describe George Lansbury. A contemporary observer who lived in Poplar echoes Shils's argument in his assertion that:

If it were possible for a city or borough to take on human shape or qualities, then Poplar would be what you know George Lansbury to be. They love each other. In the long, long ago, they 'Clicked'. Since when they have been loyal to each other with an amazing loyalty.⁷⁹

The people of Poplar were devoted to him; 'followed Lansbury blind, we would'.⁸⁰ This loyalty is summed up in a letter he received in August 1929.

If you will allow me to say, to express in terms of deep sincerety, all I owe to you, as one Individual amongst thousands, for the Education you have given me, for the lesson of Personal Integrity, quiet

76. E. Shils, 'Charisma, Order and Status', American Sociological Review, 30 (1965), 199-213 (p.201).

77. G. Haw, From Workhouse to Westminster: The Life Story of Will Crooks M.P. (London, 1911), p.vii.

78. Haw, From Workhouse to Westminster, p.xvi.

79. W.H. Lax, Lax: His Book (London, 1937), p.291.

80. interview with Mr White in Richman, pp.35-37 (p.36). All of the people interviewed by Richman, the IHT and the author thought Lansbury was wonderful.

Determinism, and above all that glorious example of good Citizen-ship, embodied, in Social Industrial and Spiritual Work for the general welfare of the people.⁸¹

Lansbury's biographer, who knew both Lansbury and Poplar well, judged that George's parliamentary 'seat was his whatever he did'.⁸² As one informant said simply, 'old Lansbury, we loved him -- he was good'.⁸³ Goodness, as was argued above, was the moral basis of neighbourliness. The communal sensibility of neighbourhood, in shaping Poplar Labour Party's politics, thus ensured it much local support; the moral concerns of local people and the local Party coincided.

The relationship between Poplar Labour Party and the bonds of neighbourhood was clearly close and complex. The communal sensibility of neighbourhood both shaped the politics of the Party and won it votes from local people. Many aspects of both the social relations and the ethic of neighbourhood life can be connected to the Party's practices, and yet more examples could be offered: the conformity of Poplar's neighbourhoods to certain unspoken orthodoxies, ranging from the obligatory aspidistra peeking between parted net curtains to the moral control exerted over others' behaviour by the street matriarchs, may well have worked to maintain Poplar Labour Party in power after voting Labour became the norm in the early 1920s.⁸⁴

However, Williams's argument concerning the relationship between a political party and their local community is a subtle one; unlike Seabrook, he does not claim that a close relation is inevitable, for he implies that the integration of a political organisation into a community's life is a project which may fail. Williams's argument suggests that the effective insertion of an organisation is less a question of an organic relationship,

81. GLP, vol 9, letter from G. Phillips, 24.8.1929.

82. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, p.220.

83. The Family Life Oral History Archive, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, interview 092, p.62.

84. for the power of wives in maintaining moral order, see Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, p.22.

and more a matter of similarities of organisation. It would be wrong then to argue that there were necessary and inevitable links between Poplar Labour Party and local street life. The next section pursues this point by looking at the relationship between the neighbourhood and right-wing organisations in Poplar.

The neighbourhood and right-wing politics

The principles of Williams's argument concerning the importance of integration into local social bonding to the success of political organisations does not apply solely to the organisations of the Left. Right-wing groups can also presumably insert themselves successfully into the social relations of neighbourhood and community, and be influenced by those social relations. This section explores this possibility, and so begins to problematise the relationship between working-class community and socialist politics.

Although right-wing groups never penetrated individual neighbourhoods as did the Labour Party with its system of neighbourhood subscription collectors, they did thrive on the sociability of the community. The Bow and Bromley Conservative Association ran frequent socials and in 1928 had 1,100 members,⁸⁵ and the Conservative Association in South Poplar was equally active, expanding in the late 1920s to open a Women's Section.⁸⁶ The Primrose League, a Conservative organisation celebrating religion, monarchy and the constitution, was also active in the borough.⁸⁷ The South Poplar Liberal and Radical Association, which supported Lloyd George, held whist drives and dances and organised a tennis club.⁸⁸ Especially popular were the activities organised for children to inculcate them with Conservative values; there were branches of the Junior

85. East London Advertiser, 16.6.1928.

86. East London Advertiser, 19.5.1928.

87. East London Advertiser, 9.3.1929.

88. East London Advertiser, 5.7.1926, 14.1.1928 and 23.2.1929.

Imperial League in Poplar, Bow and Millwall, which held well-attended dances and football competitions.⁸⁹

The sociability of community was, as the previous chapter described, a central element of right-wing ideology in the 1920s; a harmonious community wherein all co-operated for the good of all was extolled and contrasted to the conflict and division of the class war. This rhetoric assumed that a community was composed of members of all classes, whereas in Poplar the community of neighbourhoods was wholly working-class. Nonetheless, the ethic which underlay the proletarian neighbourhood could be invoked by this conservative vision of community and gain some response from the working-class, and this was a tactic adopted by various Poplar employers in an attempt to defuse the possibility of class-based conflict in their factories.

Employers tried to use Poplar's fusion of neighbourhood, kin and work for their own ends. A common strategy was to claim that all the workers, from the production line to the boardroom, were members of one happy family. Bryant and May workers were told that they were 'all members of the great family',⁹⁰ and factory Sports Days and outings were often presented as rather large families at play, frequently as affectionate fathers/directors indulging their daughters/ workers, and seem to have tapped Poplar workers' boisterousness and good humour. This could be successful in uniting the workers and management, resulting in a labourforce duly grateful for their paternal employers; as the girls at Hayes Cocoa Company said of their manager, 'we feel that he is as concerned for our welfare as he would be for his own daughters, and we fully appreciate all his kindness'.⁹¹ There were no strikes at Hayes during the 1920s. And if some employers played upon the importance of family to its Poplar employees, others

89. East London Advertiser, 11.2.1928, 17.11.1928 and 9.3.1929.

90. Bryant and May, Brymay Magazine, October 1921, p.1.

91. East London Advertiser, 27.3.1920.

invoked the neighbourhood; a dairy in Bow chose to stress its small scale, neighbourly character in its publicity.⁹²

The importance of kin and neighbourhood to Poplar's politics were thus not confined to Poplar Labour Party. Employers, often members of the PBMA, used them too. The PBMA were keen to stress the fact that, like those of the local Labour Party, their candidates were also Poplar born and bred and had known desperate poverty at first hand, and in the 1922 Guardian elections the PBMA made a special effort to adopt working-class candidates;⁹³ Clive Lewis was a 'warehouseman, who has by sheer industry risen from the ranks',⁹⁴ Ben Alcock was forced out to work at the age of seven by the death of his father in an industrial accident,⁹⁵ Alfred Brandy had started life as a shop boy,⁹⁶ Abram Silk was a basket-maker,⁹⁷ Alfred Warren was an east Londoner through and through.⁹⁸

That the PBMA could also utilise the communal sensibilities of Poplar voters was recognised by Poplar Labour Party; as chapter II described, in its commitment to political education the Party never relied on the automatic support of local people. This active seeking of the working-class vote suggests that the connections between Poplar Labour Party and the borough's neighbourhood life was not as intimate as the previous sub-section suggested. The next section explores this possibility further.

92. THLHL, Thomas Brothers, Thomas Bros.: What's Behind the Window? (Poplar, 1931).

93. East London Advertiser, 1.4.1922.

94. THLHL, PBMAA handbill 1922 council election.

95. East End News, 20.20.1922.

96. East End News, 18.12.1936.

97. East London Advertiser, 14.3.1942.

98. East London Advertiser, 8.6.1918.

Forging the links between community and socialism

The efforts made by Poplar Labour Party to persuade people to vote for them have been a constant theme of this study. They have been explained in terms of the Party's belief in democracy in chapters II and III, and in the natural socialism of politically educated workers earlier in the present chapter. In this section, aspects of those efforts will be examined in order to suggest that the links between the communal sensibility of neighbourhood and the politics of Poplar Labour Party were not as inevitable as the previous discussion implied.

Given the importance of neighbourhood life to Poplar people, the Party's responses to the problems of the community, shaped as they were by the local communal sensibility of neighbourhood, might be assumed to have been the cause of the strength of local support for the Party. Yet although the Party's provision of housing, municipal services and relief contributed to its electoral success, they were not its sufficient cause. People still had to be persuaded to vote Labour, and the Party's commitment to publicising its ideas must be further discussed in this context. This section begins by describing the extent to which Poplar Labour Party's policies did guarantee its electoral success.

Prompted by its statist welfarism, the Party reacted to the borough's poverty with a housing programme which won much local support in its attempts to improve this aspect of constituents' lives. One of my informants who, as a young girl, had lived in a bug-ridden jerry-built house in Bow described moving into one of Poplar council's barrack-like blocks of flats as 'marvellous, absolute heaven',⁹⁹

99. interview with Mrs Sumner. Poplar Labour Party's commitment to better housing was the source of one of its many disagreements with the London Labour Party. The latter refused to co-operate in publicising an issue of Housing Bonds by the London County Council in 1920 on the grounds that it was a derisory effort in the face of such an enormous problem and that massive central government funding should be made available to tackle it; Poplar Labour Party in contrast supported the issue: East London Advertiser, 19.6.1920.

and that improved housing was one of the major expectations of people who voted Labour can be seen in the rowdy public meetings which occurred in the early 1930s at which the council's failure to provide more housing was heavily criticised.¹⁰⁰

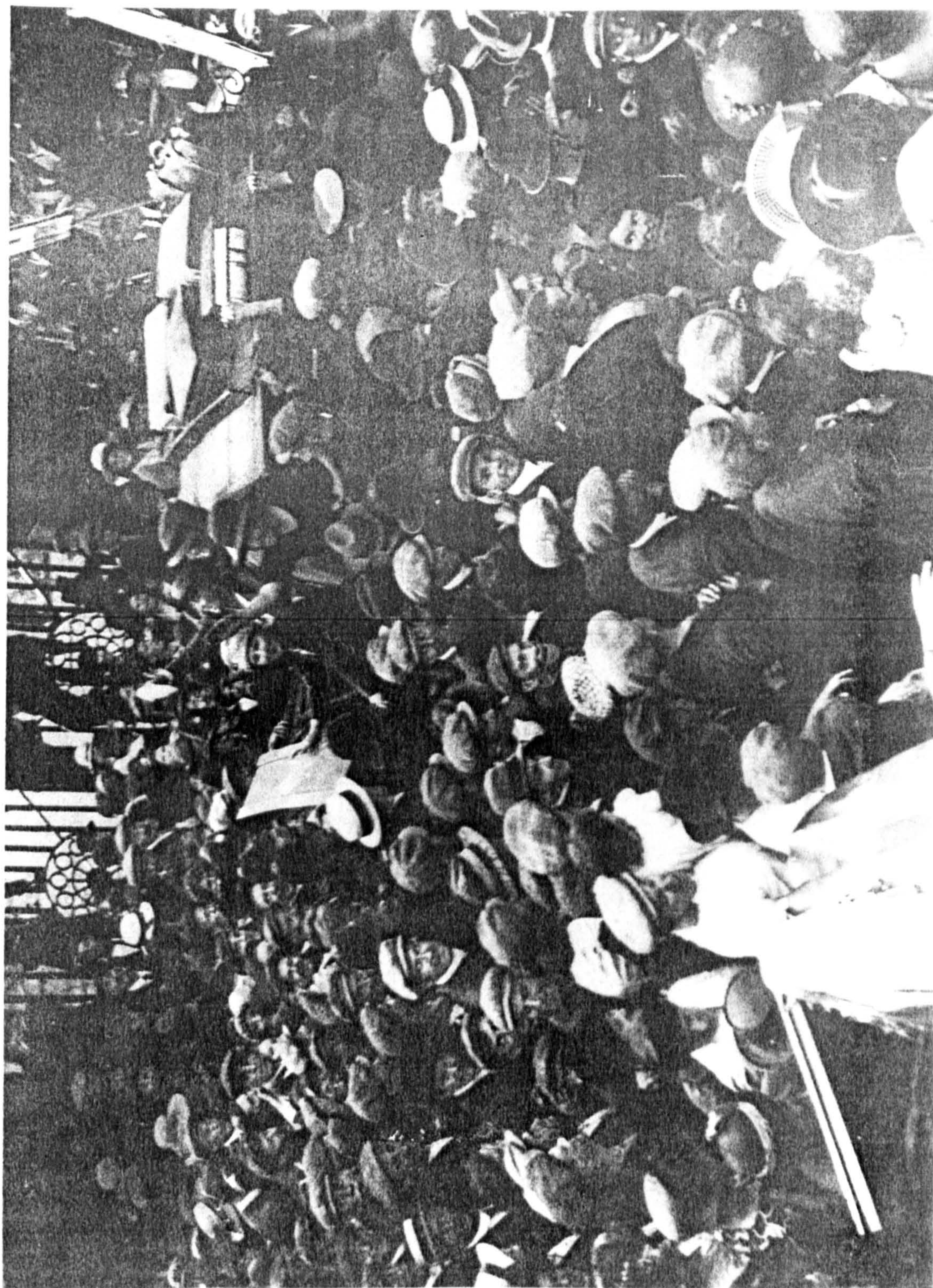
Poplar Labour Party attacked other aspects of the locality's poverty too. The popularity of the municipal services provided by the council -- its baths, its washhouses (visited over a thousand times a year), its maternity and child welfare clinics (forty thousand visits a year), its cheaper electricity, its unemployment relief works (which employed five thousand men between 1919 and 1925) --¹⁰¹ encouraged support for the Party, and, given the prevailing domestic division of labour, did so especially among women. This can be seen in the photographs of the crowds supporting the Poplar councillors as they were taken to gaol in 1921; photographs of political demonstrations usually contain only men, but in Poplar the women were out in force too.

But perhaps the greatest cause of local support for the Party was its relief policy (a policy which, as chapter II argued, also especially affected women). That Poplar's Board of Guardians was generous in both its scale of relief and the number of people to whom they gave relief was mentioned in the first chapter, and the complaints of the PBMA concerning the electoral implications of that policy were recorded in the third. Through an analysis of relief statistics and election turnout figures, Deacon and Briggs have suggested that such complaints were justified, and that if an individual was in receipt of relief they did almost certainly vote for the party with the most generous relief policy: in effect, vote Labour.¹⁰² This is hardly a surprising conclusion, and it is one that appears to hold good for Poplar. The table on the page after next

100. see for example East London Advertiser, 6.12.1930.

101. PMBC, The Work of Six Years 1919-1925 (Poplar, 1925).

102. A. Deacon and E. Briggs, 'Local Democracy and Central Policy: The Issue of Pauper Votes in the 1920s', Policy and Politics, 2 (1973), 347-64 (p.358).



The crowds watching the councillors being taken to gaol, 1921; note the many women present

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

TABLE 9
 NUMBERS IN RECEIPT OF RELIEF
 FROM POPLAR BOARD OF GUARDIANS 1919-29

	total in receipt of indoor relief	total in receipt of outdoor relief
1 Jan 1919	na	na
1 Jan 1920	na	na
1 Jan 1921	3,083	5,125
1 Jan 1922	na	na
1 Jan 1923	3,393	21,761
1 Jan 1924	3,592	17,721
1 Jan 1925	3,618	25,479
1 Jan 1926	3,694	27,872
1 Jan 1927	3,886	29,548
1 Jan 1928	3,648	25,524
1 Jan 1929	3,568	17,847

Source: London County Council, London Statistics vols 26-34
 (London, 1919-30)

summarises the precise extent of relief in the borough. In January 1925, 29.2 per cent, or twenty-seven thousand, of Poplar's electorate were in receipt of relief;¹⁰³ in the elections of April that year Labour won every seat on the Board of Guardians with a total vote of twenty-six thousand.¹⁰⁴ That is, although paupers were only 29.2 per cent of the total electorate, if all had voted they would have been 100 per cent of the turnout. It seems quite clear that its relief policy virtually guaranteed Poplar Labour Party a majority on the Board.¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, the Party felt compelled to remind voters of their interests in voting for Labour candidates; it did not take its success for granted and went to some effort to reinforce the material self-interest of its constituents by reminding them of Labour's generosity towards them. It extolled its past efforts in order to persuade voters to re-elect it to office. As a handbill for the 1925 Board of Guardian elections put it:

We said that we would care for the sick and the orphans, that we would improve and brighten up the lives of the aged, and that we would give maintenance and help to the unemployed. ALL THESE THINGS WE HAVE DONE. We said that we would continue to do the work of the Guardians in the new spirit we brought about as soon as we got a majority of members on the Board. WE HAVE DONE THIS TOO. Those who remember the mean and niggardly spirit in which the sick and the poor were dealt with before you gave us control, will never dream of going back to the bad old days when poverty and destitution were crimes.¹⁰⁶

A vote for Labour in Poplar was not seen as inevitable by the Party therefore, and there was some justification for this attitude. As Map 3 showed, the PBMA won some support for its anti-Poplarism campaign from ordinary working-class

103. Briggs and Deacon, 'Local Democracy and Central Policy', p.360.

104. These figures have been calculated from the turnout statistics in the London County Council, London Statistics 1925-26 (London, 1926) and the election results in the East London Advertiser, 11.4.1925.

105. East London Advertiser, 11.4.1925.

106. THLHL, Labour Party handbill 1925 Board of Guardians election.

people who disliked what they saw as scroungers and loafers who preferred to live on relief and the dole rather than work for a living.¹⁰⁷ It does not seem possible then to assume that material calculation alone by voters carried Labour into office in poor working-class areas.

Perhaps Poplar Labour Party realised this. Certainly a crucial strategy it used to ensure votes was to present its candidates as local, and therefore familiar and reliable, characters in its election publicity. The Party went to great lengths to stress how typical its candidates were of Poplar. MAKE LANSBURY, THE MAN YOU KNOW, YOUR M.P. trumpeted election posters in 1922.¹⁰⁸ 'We all live in your midst. If rates and rents are high, we suffer with you,' Poplar Labour Party told voters, 'we are part of the life you lead'.¹⁰⁹ 'We are no strangers to you for we have lived among you practically all our lives ... leading the simple, common lives of working people', said Dave and Ada Adams.¹¹⁰ Voters were also informed that George and Bessie Lansbury 'have lived among you for thirty five years, and you know all about us both'.¹¹¹ The first issue of a monthly journal from Poplar's labour movement in 1920 heavily criticised Bow and Bromley's Conservative M.P. for his lack of interest in and knowledge of his constituency.¹¹²

This emphasis on local roots must have been drawing upon the simple assumption that local people best

107. An anonymous letter to the PBMA informed them of a man who was making no effort to find work; 'this man will be like this to the End of his life what a shame and disgrace. This is what Lansbury as done. all these Loafers want is Beer': PBMAA, letter enclosed in another from H.I. Cooper, 26.4.1922.

108. see the local press in November 1922.

109. THLHL, Poplar Labour Party leaflet 1922 council election.

110. THLHL, South Poplar Labour Party handbill 1931 general election.

111. GLP, vol 30b, Bow and Bromley Labour Party handbill 1922 general election.

112. East London Advertiser, 21.8.1920. Unfortunately no copies of this journal appear to have survived.

understood local needs and were therefore the best means of answering them. But it was also a part of Poplar's culture which has not yet been described: a strong local patriotism.¹¹³ There was a parochialism in Poplar and even if, as in the cases of George Lansbury or John Scurr, election candidates were active in national politics, it was their local identity which was expected to appeal to voters. This is evident in the opinion of a Poplar man recalling George Lansbury's international peace mission in the later 1930s:

Lansbury's big mistake was when he left Poplar ... then, to leave your place, you were in for hell of a lot of trouble in those days. He had to be on his doorstep -- people knocking all day and all night -- especially people like George Lansbury. That was the slip up there.¹¹⁴

This belief in the political importance of local concerns was shared by Poplar politicians, typical as they were of the locality; one of the most prominent themes in the rhetoric of Poplar Labour Party during the Poplarism episode was the claim that Poplarism benefitted Poplar's 'own people' in the face of the 'criminal indifference of Central Government'.¹¹⁵ The Party was 'collecting money for local affairs' and critics who did not live in the borough could not possibly understand its action.¹¹⁶ Thus the stress placed on the local roots of its candidates by Poplar Labour Party drew on a strong faith in locally based politicians and politics. The Party was utilising local patriotism to win local votes.

This section has been concerned to prise apart the relationship between community and politics by questioning

113. J. Scurr, East London Advertiser, 31.3.1923. See also E. Baillie, The Shabby Paradise: The Autobiography of a Decade (London, 1958), p.51; Richman, Ely a Flag for Poplar, p.14. Boxing, a very popular sport in east London, gained much of its interest from local identification with local boys; see THLHL, biographical press cuttings on Teddy Baldock; Goldman, East End My Cradle, p.64.

114. interview with Mr Brinson in Richman, Ely a Flag for Poplar, pp.87-90 (p.89).

115. East London Advertiser, 26.3.1921.

116. East London Advertiser, 16.4.1921.

the idea that Labour politics were an inevitable result of the social relations of working-class community in Poplar. Following the suggestion that employers and the PBMA also drew upon various aspects of Poplar's conviviality, kinship and neighbourliness with some success, it argued that the Labour Party had to remind its constituents of the benefits to be had from a Labour-controlled council and Board of Guardians. Clearly the material benefits offered by Poplar Labour Party were real; and these were the major causes of its mass support in the borough. The point of this section has not been to deny this causal connection but rather to clarify its nature. The connection between Poplar Labour Party and the community was not a mysterious organic bond which grew inevitably from the structural conditions of the locality, but was one based on specific organisational and political tactics -- on specific relations and specific processes, of which an appeal to local patriotism was not the least important. Socialism, contra Seabrook, was not the only possible politics of neighbourhood.

The meaning of neighbourhood

The previous sections questioned the political implications of the bonds of neighbourhood and community, suggesting that socialism was not necessarily the inevitable outcome of working-class neighbourhood life. Now the other side of the coin will be explored more critically: the nature of the communal neighbourhood itself.

In this chapter the terms 'neighbourhood' and 'community' have been used interchangeably because the aspects of neighbourhood so far considered have been those with which the concept of community is popularly associated: mutuality, solidarity, territory. This is also the interpretation of community used by Seabrook in his argument that the idea neighbourhood is the source of working-class politics (and by the political right in the 1920s as a counter to class divisions, as chapter III explained). These connotations of community are not neutral. They are seen as good things, and thus community

'unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc.) ... seems never to be used unfavourably'.¹¹⁷ The source of the enormous difficulties faced by sociologists in their attempts to analyse the concept of community has been located by Bell and Newby in just these emotionally loaded connotations of co-operation, friendliness and warmth which float around the notion of community in a golden haze of desirability.¹¹⁸

People who lived in Poplar in the 1920s describe the locality as a community: one interviewee for example replied to a question of whether he knew his neighbours with 'oh, yes. It was one big community' and another remarked, 'it was a warm place, the East End, it was a community. People helped one another quite a lot and were quite cheerful'.¹¹⁹ An obvious methodological problem raised by this use of the term community by interviewees is that their memories of past social relations will be recalled through that golden haze which has so bedevilled sociologists; division and conflict will be neglected in favour of memories of doors that were never locked, food that tasted better, neighbours that never quarrelled and summers when it never rained. Cornwell has suggested that this image of the 'good old days' is especially likely to be presented to outsiders such as social researchers by their informants, and she says that as a result, the researcher seeking the truth must undertake extended interviews in order to replace this 'public' account with a more accurate, less idealised 'private' account.¹²⁰ Much of the methodology of oral history is concerned with the same problem -- and it is perceived as a problem -- of

117. R. Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society second edition (London, 1983), p.76.

118. C. Bell and H. Newby, Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community (London, 1971).

119. interview with Mr Brinson in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.87-90 (p.88), and interview with Mr Maillard by the author, 16.6.1987.

120. J. Cornwell, Hard-Earned Lives: Accounts of Health and Illness from East London (London, 1984), pp.13-17.

eliminating nostalgic bias in favour of more truthful accounts of the past.¹²¹

This chapter must then tackle the issues of division and conflict in Poplar which it has so far neglected. This section will explore the conflict and change experienced by Poplar during the 1920s.

Division and conflict in 1920s Poplar

To claim that divisions and conflict existed within and between neighbourhoods raises further doubts about the argument that the mutuality of neighbourhood created working-class support for the Labour Party because it questions the reality of that mutuality. The tensions within Poplar's 'community' will now be examined.

The first point to make is that the harmony of neighbourhood life can be exaggerated. Domestic violence was not unknown, and nor were feuds between neighbours,¹²² and even the everyday friendliness was not as intimate as is sometimes suggested. Although neighbours would be greeted in the street there was a great reluctance to invite each other into the home for fear of gossip.¹²³ As a man who lived in Moran Street in Poplar said,

My mother had a golden rule, never get too friendly with your neighbours, and never invite them in.

121. see for example R. Grant, 'Archives and Interviews: A Comment on Oral History and Fieldwork Practice', Geography, 72 (1987), 27-35; P. Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford, 1978). A favourite technique is to compare the oral evidence with the archival; for an example of this, and one where the editor of transcribed interview has become the author of the finished work, see R. Samuel, East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding (London, 1981).

122. interview with Mr Franklin; IHT, interview with Mr Emms. Domestic violence was certainly not as pervasive as Ross argues for the period before the Great War: E. Ross, 'Fierce Questions and Taunts': Married Life in Working-Class London 1970-1914', Feminist Studies, 8 (1982), 575-602.

123. This is a central theme in R. Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (Manchester, 1971).

You get too friendly, tell them too much, they get in the house and then they go and gossip.¹²⁴

In streets which were of higher social status, the conviviality of neighbours was entirely lacking; a minister who lived in Campbell Road, Bow, where 'there is a definite consciousness of social superiority',¹²⁵ claimed that 'neighbours are strangers to each other',¹²⁶ and concluded 'we live our own lives, follow our own pursuits, and deny to everyone else the right to intrude into our affairs' (p.25). Old age too could lead to isolation; although many old people either lived with sons or daughters or saw them regularly, the New Survey of London Life and Labour found many of the elderly leading lonely, empty and poverty-stricken lives.¹²⁷

Similarly, relations between neighbourhoods were not always the friendliest possible. The very mutuality of the social relations within neighbourhoods created antagonisms between them; 'you didn't know very much about any other street but your own',¹²⁸ and people tended to be suspicious of strangers who did not belong to their street.¹²⁹

People would come in and nick all the gas meters ... It would be someone who would be eight or ten streets away, and our lot would operate in their area. The point is, if you got away with it there would be ten bob's worth of coppers.¹³⁰

These inter-neighbourhood conflicts were especially important to children.

One of our streets did not know what the next street did; it might be as sundered as forbidden

124. interview with Mr French in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.105-08 (p.106).

125. C. Grant, Earthing Bundles (Bromley-by-Bow, 1930), p.73.

126. W.H. Lax, Adventure in Poplar (London, 1933), p.230.

127. New Survey MC, file 2/1, memorandum on old age pensioners in Bermondsey, Stepney and Poplar. Grant also noted the loneliness of the elderly; Grant, Earthing Bundles p.111.

128. interview with Mrs Sumner.

129. interview with Mr Maillard.

130. interview with Mr Beer in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.72-76 (p.72).

territory. A boy ... might loiter there at his peril. He was a foreigner, though only from round the corner.¹³¹

Gangs of young men were neighbourhood based, and their rivalry would occasionally erupt into violence.¹³²

Boys of one street challenge those of another. Murderous weapons are employed. Times and places are fixed by appointed leaders. Strict secrecy is observed in all negotiations.¹³³

Perhaps the most important division between neighbourhoods was that of status.¹³⁴ All my informants distinguished between nice and not-so-nice streets in their area, and when young many were not allowed to play with children from less respectable roads.

Divisions of status also partially accounted for the distinctions between districts within the borough of Poplar. Of course sheer distance was a factor in dividing Poplar too. One Bow resident told me 'Poplar seemed quite a long way from Bow, a bit removed'; but she continued, 'Poplar always seemed to me to be a sort of rough part of the borough, not that I knew anything about it'.¹³⁵ The higher status of Bow as compared to Poplar is confirmed in the account of a Bethnal Green resident who remembers, 'my sister Eva said we lived in Bow. Indeed, our address was Bow, E.3, and it sounded a bit more posh, but whether she liked it or not, we came under Bethnal Green borough council'.¹³⁶ Bow also had a rather different political tradition from the south of the borough, although Lansbury claimed in 1925 that this no longer affected the unity of the borough's Labour Party.

131. Tomlinson, A Mingled Yarn, p.12.

132. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father, p.31.

133. Lax, Adventure in Poplar, p.192.

134. for a discussion of 'respectability' in east London before the First World War, see E. Ross, 'Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep': Respectability in Pre-World War One London Neighbourhoods', International Labour and Working-Class History, 27 (1985), 39-59.

135. interview with Mrs Sumner.

136. Bailey, Children of the Green, p.5.

Up till recent years, Bow and Bromley was the left wing and Poplar the right. To-day all the muddle-headed Fabian intellectualism which caused the old Poplar Labour League to unite itself with Liberalism masquerading as Progressivism, has been swept away and now there is neither right nor left wing. We are all clear class-conscious Socialists working together using the whole machinery of local government and Parliament for the transformation of Capitalist Society into Socialism.¹³⁷

This is perhaps overly optimistic; a councillor in the 1930s recalls divisions in the council chamber between the representatives of north and south of the borough.¹³⁸ If it ever existed, the moment of borough-wide unity was brief indeed and did not fundamentally alter the north-south divide in Poplar borough.

The relative wealth of Bow compared to the rest of the borough was often attributed to its concentration of railway workers,¹³⁹ but there were also some Jews in the area. There was a synagogue on Bow Road and most Jewish families seem to have worked in profitable family firms of tailors.¹⁴⁰

Mention of Poplar's Jewish population introduces the ethnic divisions within Poplar borough. The most significant ethnic minority in terms of numbers were the Irish (although it is impossible to place an accurate figure on their population). They tended to live in a few streets south of Poplar High Street, as the map on the next page shows, and each year this neighbourhood was confirmed as Irish when the annual Catholic procession wound through the neighbourhood.¹⁴¹ The Irish were also bound together by occupation, for the men often worked in the docks,

137. G. Lansbury in C.W. Key, Red Poplar: Six Years of Socialist Rule (London, 1925), p.3.

138. autobiography of A. Overland in Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, pp.91-3 (p.92).

139. THLHL, untitled handwritten memoirs of A.E. Hurren (1967); Grant, Earthing Bundles, p.74.

140. New Survey HCS. Bow was described as 'distinctly Jewish'; Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.20.

141. THLHL, SS. Mary and Joseph Catholic Church, Programme of the Solemn Out-of-Door Procession in Honour of our Lady of Ransom, 22.7.1928.

Map 7 Residence of Irish population in one Catholic parish

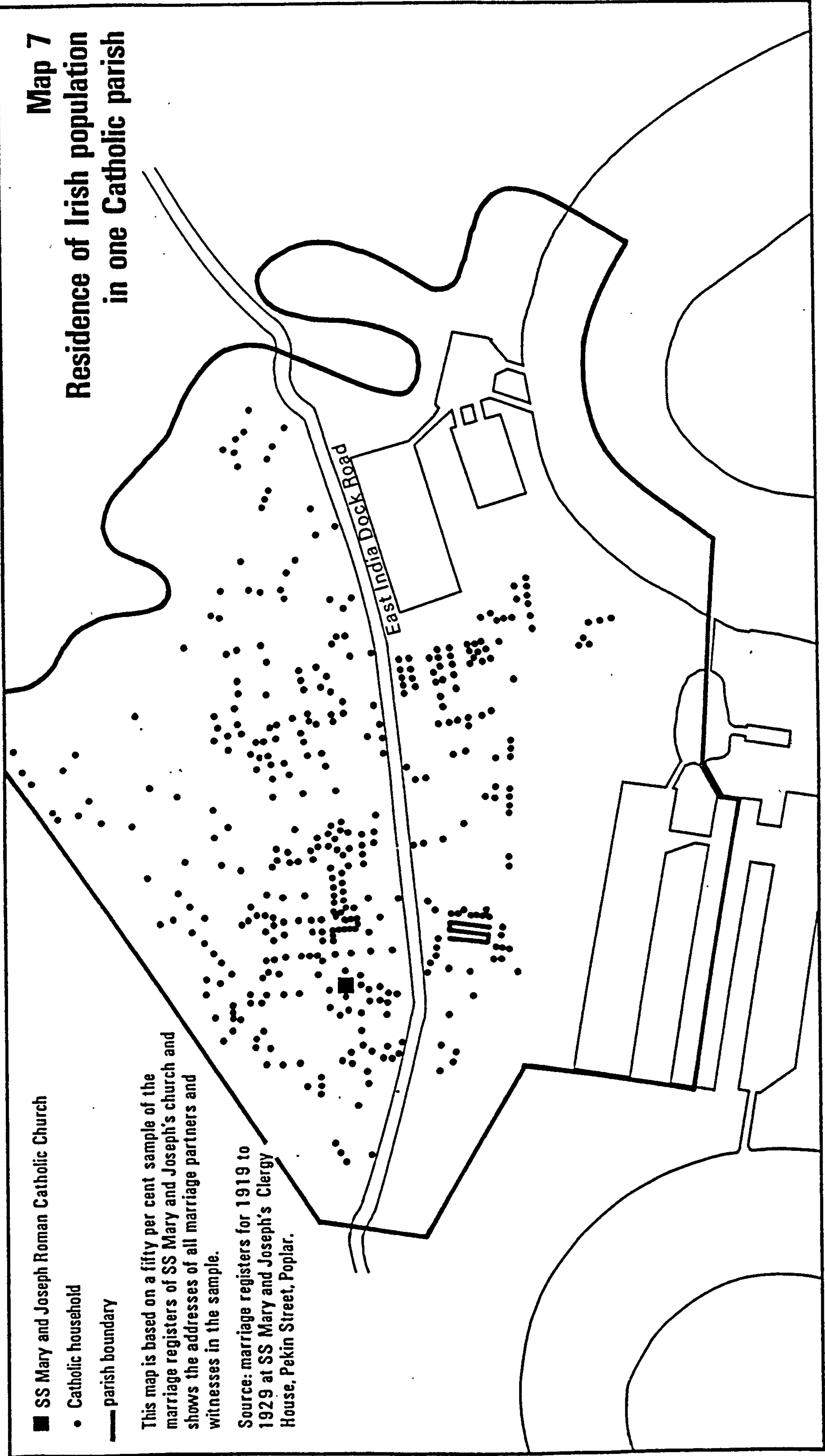
■ SS Mary and Joseph Roman Catholic Church

• Catholic household

— parish boundary

This map is based on a fifty per cent sample of the marriage registers of SS Mary and Joseph's church and shows the addresses of all marriage partners and witnesses in the sample.

Source: marriage registers for 1919 to 1929 at SS Mary and Joseph's Clergy House, Pekin Street, Poplar.



particularly as stevedores, and often passed stevedoring jobs and skills from father to son.¹⁴² This Irish community had its own bonds: that of the church of course, but also its own settlements, its own sick club, its own pubs and to a certain extent its own politics. Both Poplar and Bow had branches of the Irish Self-Determination League and at least two of Poplar's Labour councillors were involved in them.¹⁴³

The last ethnic group which should be mentioned are the Chinese, who had settled in Pennyfields at the westerly end of the East India Dock Road. Many were originally sailors who now ran restaurants or lodging houses for their compatriots; some were sailors still, living in the Asiatics Home in West India Dock Road.¹⁴⁴ They do not seem to have been politically active, apart from a well-attended meeting at Poplar Town Hall organised by the Communist Party in protest at the intervention of the British government in China's upheaval of 1927.¹⁴⁵ Despite this isolation, however, and their lurid reputation for drugs and gambling and the white slave trade,¹⁴⁶ the people of

142. J. Lovell, 'The Irish and the London Dockers', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 35 (1977), 16-18; J.A. Jackson, 'The Irish in East London', East London Papers, 6 (1963), 105-19.

143. The settlements of St Anthony's and of the Holy Child Jesus in Poplar were both Roman Catholic: C.R. Attlee, The Social Worker (London, 1920), p.218; C.C. Martindale, 'The Poplar Settlement', The Month, 155 (1930), 109-18. The Benevolent Society of St Patrick is mentioned in the Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine, Annual Report 1924-5 (Poplar, 1925), unpaginated (THLHL). Catholics tended to drink in Mann and Crossman pubs while Protestants drank Trumans or Walkers: Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, p.16. Chris Kelly and John Scurr were the active councillors in Irish politics: National Union of Railwaymen, Railway Review, 10.10.1924, p.7; THLHL, East End Pioneer, 9 (1921), p.3.

144. N.K. Choo, The Chinese in London (London, 1968).

145. Communist Papers: Documents Selected From Those Obtained on the Arrest of the Communist Leaders, cmd 2682, PP 1926 XXIII, p.79.

146. see the stories of Thomas Burke, especially Limehouse Nights: Tales of Chinatown (London, 1917). Intermarriage between the Chinese and the indigenous population was

Poplar seem to have been tolerant of the Chinese; Chinese men in particular were considered to make good husbands.¹⁴⁷ This toleration extended to the Irish and the Jews too.¹⁴⁸ Although these ethnic groups were always identified as different from 'ordinary' Poplar people, there seem to have been no prejudices against them generally and none of the ethnic sectionalism to be found in neighbouring Stepney;¹⁴⁹ as a symbol of this, map 7 showing the pattern of Irish residence showed no evidence of ghettoisation. Husbands has attributed this tolerance to a history of immigration into the borough, but it is also possible that the decades of socialist rhetoric had had an effect.¹⁵⁰

Nonetheless, racial violence was not unknown in the borough; Poplar was the site of several large and violent anti-German riots during the First World War and in the 1920s a black American, Claude McKay, came to visit Sylvia Pankhurst and was disgusted by the racism he encountered.¹⁵¹

especially abhorrent to contemporary middle-class observers. 'An appalling amount of degradation was caused by the intermarrying of the Chinese with English women. The immorality of the business was painful and disgusting'; Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.227.

147. interviews with Mr Maillard and Mr Stothard; and see Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar, p.16.

148. interviews with Mr Stothard and Mrs Sumner; IHT, summary of interview with Mrs Anderson, no date, p.5.

149. for an account of this sectionalism, see K. Harris, Attlee (London, 1982), p.46.

150. C.T. Husbands, 'East End Racism: Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Extreme Right-Wing Political Behaviour', London Journal, 8 (1982), 3-26. Kosmin argues that the strong socialist tradition of Battersea was the reason for the repeated election in the 1920s of the black politician S. Saklatvala as Battersea's Communist M.P.; B. Kosmin, 'Political Identity in Battersea', in Living in South London: Perspectives on Battersea 1871-1981, edited by S. Wallman (London, 1982), pp.17-51.

151. Paper presented at the Institute of Historical Research by P. Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots in First World War London', February 1988; C. McKay, A Long Way From Home (New York, 1969).

There was certainly division and conflict in the borough then; and so too was there change.

Change in Poplar during the 1920s

Like the degree of conflict within Poplar, the changes the borough experienced during the 1920s were not as extensive as in some other areas of working-class London.¹⁵² Nonetheless, change there was, which, like the conflict, casts doubt on the notion of a stable and harmonious community.

The tight neighbourhood networks loosened up a little, for example, mainly because material conditions were improving, although since the underlying motivation of the networks was not wholly material neighbourhoods continued to be bound together by sharing, lending and borrowing among their inhabitants. The provisions of the welfare state at both central and local level were decreasing reliance on neighbours; a report on unemployment in east London in 1922 noted that desperate as the suffering was, it 'is less than would have been caused before the war by a Dock strike or a lockout'.¹⁵³ The 1920s were also a decade of rising living standards for both skilled and unskilled workers, calculated the New Survey.¹⁵⁴ The limited geography of neighbourhood life was also being widened by the increasing numbers of young people leaving the borough to work. The 1921 Census revealed two thirds of Poplar's workers lived in the borough, but by the end of the decade half of the borough's labourforce under the age of twenty-five were commuting into other boroughs to work.¹⁵⁵

And in part too, albeit to a degree difficult to judge with any accuracy, the old insular and conformist

152. see for example the account of Islington in J. White, The Worst Street in North London: Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars (London, 1986).

153. Toynbee hall, Unemployment in East London: The Report of a Survey Made from Toynbee Hall (London, 1922), p.3.

154. New Survey I, p.139.

155. New Survey, HCS.

neighbourhoods were being opened up through new patterns of leisure. The cinema in particular brought new aspirations, new fashions and new dreams, as a study of the south London borough of 'Romwell' noted:

one of the most human aspects of life in my Borough, and one that is most apt to be overlooked -- the addiction to make-believe, to invent a second existence which shall gild the dull, routine world in which we of Romwell were compelled to live. This was, naturally, more frequent in the younger woman, at once more imaginative and less habituated to the drudgery of office or workshop.¹⁵⁶

All these changes affected women most. It was women who most often stinted themselves food and clothes for the sake of their family and who thus stood to benefit most from what little more affluence there was and it was women who went most often to the cinema and who dressed to look like Garbo.¹⁵⁷ In 1926 the editor of the East London Advertiser protested at that symbol of young women's new-found freedom, make-up:

I was in a tramcar the other day when a dozen girls got in. They were returning to work, and each one had daubed her lips until they were easily the most conspicuous feature of the face. It was a disgusting exhibition.¹⁵⁸

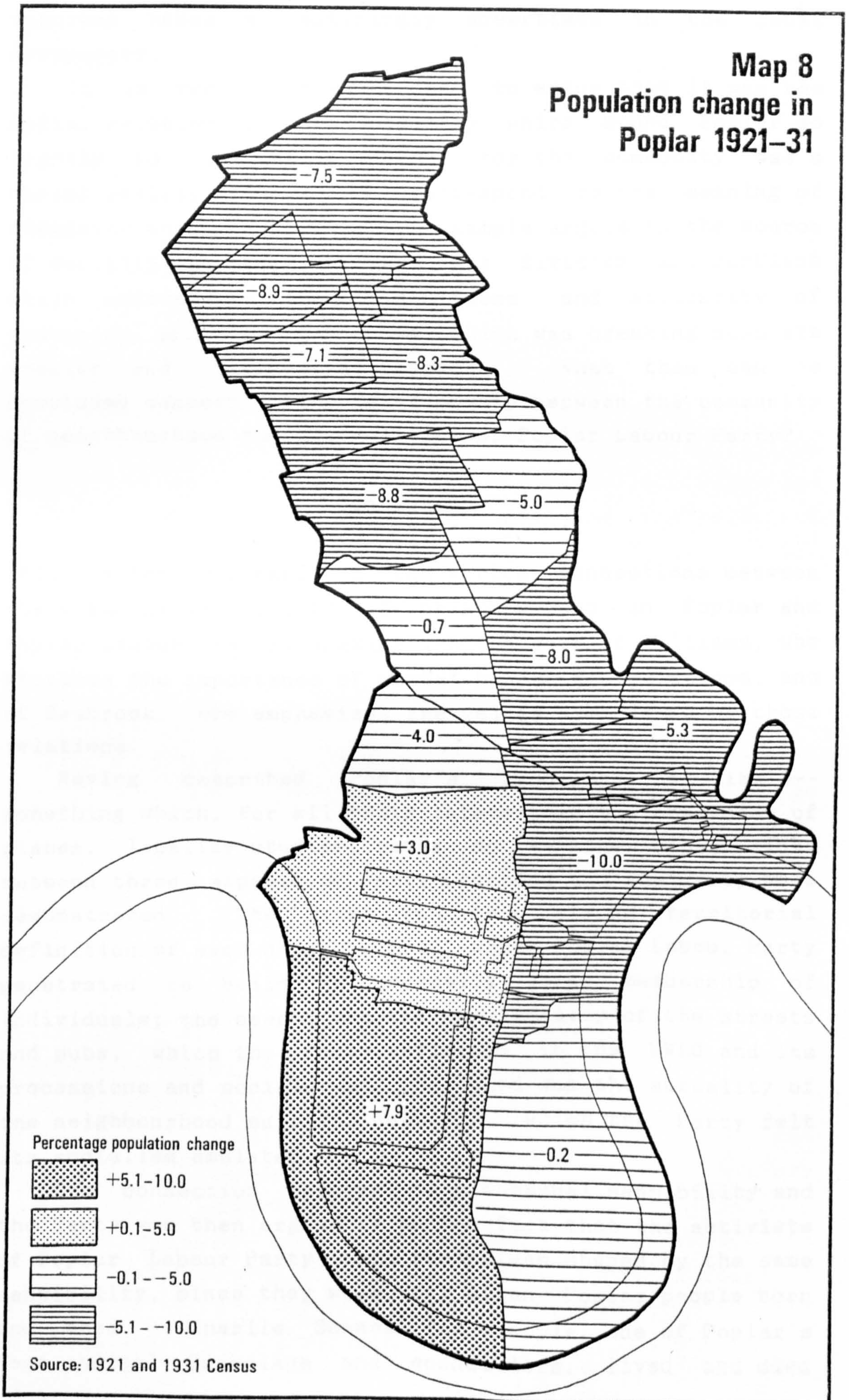
The sense that, despite the poverty and unemployment and slums, there were new opportunities to be taken is perhaps best symbolised not by lipstick however but by the numbers of people leaving the borough during the 1920s. Between 1921 and 1931, the Census records that Poplar lost 4.6 per cent of its population, or 7,489 people. Most of those who left lived in the wealthier north of the borough, as the map overleaf shows; they it was who could afford the new

156. O.M. Hueffer, Some of the English: A Study Towards a Study (London, 1930), p.221.

157. The New Survey discovered cinema to be a female past-time: New Survey, IX, p.46-7. White too argues that changes in inter-war working-class communities affected women more than men, but he attributes this many of his Islington women working in the new light manufacturing industries; White, The Worst Street in North London. According to the 1929 New Survey HCS, hardly any young women from Poplar left inner London to work in these new suburban factories.

158. East London Advertiser, 17.7.1926.

Map 8
Population change in
Poplar 1921-31



suburban homes so enticingly advertised in the local newspapers.

It is very difficult then to argue that it was the social relations of the community which bound Poplar so tightly to its Labour Party, for the 'community' was a social reality which did not correspond to the meaning of community which Seabrook for example argues is the source of socialist politics. There was division and conflict which undermined the friendliness and solidarity of community, and there was change which was breaking down its insular and territorial aspects. What then can be concluded concerning the relationship between the community of neighbourhood and the politics of Poplar Labour Party?

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the various connections between the communal sensibility of neighbourhood in Poplar and Poplar Labour Party, drawing on the work of Williams, who stresses the importance of social bonds and relations, and of Seabrook, who emphasises the values symbolised by those relations.

Having described Poplar's landscape a little-- something which, for all their interest in the character of places, locality-studies never do -- the close links between three aspects of neighbourhood and the Party were demonstrated. The first was the strong territorial definition of each neighbourhood, which Poplar Labour Party penetrated to build an unusually large membership of individuals; the second was the conviviality of the streets and pubs, which the Party reflected in the PWLG and its processions and socials; and the third was the mutuality of the neighbourhood survival networks, which the Party felt its socialism emulated.

The connection between this communal sensibility and the Party was then argued to be the fact that the activists of Poplar Labour Party were themselves shaped by the same sensibility, since they were very often Poplar people born and bred. Charlie Sumner, for example, one of Poplar's most radical Guardians and councillors, lived and died

within fifty yards of the Knapp Road slum cottage where he was born in 1867,¹⁵⁹ and this gave him a 'homely intimacy' with Poplar people.¹⁶⁰ It was this typicality, together with the material benefits to be gained from Labour, which bound the Party so closely to the people.

It is crucial to the argument of this thesis however to note that this tight bond was not an inevitable one. It was initiated by the local roots of many of Poplar's Labour activists, but its elements were also constructed, and carefully constructed, by Poplar Labour Party. That typicality, those material benefits, were stressed and stressed again by the Party in its election campaigns. For as the Party recognised, the political Right could also insert itself into the community life of the borough and could also appeal to local sensibilities; the political implications of neighbourhood were not inherently socialist.

If this underdetermination of politics by the neighbourly ethics and practices is true in terms of the right also exploiting neighbourliness, then it is also true in terms of the nature of neighbourliness itself. Territory, sociability and mutuality were not the only qualities to be found in Poplar's neighbourhood life; so too were division, conflict and a certain degree of change, and the last part of the chapter examined these.

Through the evident existence of conflict and the loosening of neighbourhood networks during the 1920s it can be seen that if the connections between Party and neighbourliness were constructed, so too was the very nature of neighbourliness. The communal sensibility of caring and sharing was not a simple reflection of social reality. It was in fact a selective assertion of certain elements of social life. This is not to deny the importance of such selective accounts, as oral history methodologies determined to root out sentimentalised memories seem to do. Accounts of life which fail to correspond to reconstructions of them by historians or

159. interview with Mr Sumner.

160. East London Advertiser, 23.9.1922.

sociologists are none the less valid for that; and it will now be argued that they are especially valid to the understanding of politics.

Neighbourliness to people in Poplar involved a very strong and self-conscious sense of their ideal life-style.

This Island, what I can remember of this Island, everybody was very friendly, it was a little--well, everybody said it was a little village and everybody was friendly with one another.¹⁶¹

'Everybody said it was a little village'. Such rural metaphors recur in many accounts of life in this most un-rural of London boroughs in the 1920s. Friendly communities are very often described as villages, and this pastoral model of a rural utopia in which 'everybody was very friendly' is common enough to qualify as a 'vital, crucial layer' in the locality's culture, to use the terminology of Shils. And it was this idealised version of community to which Poplar Labour Party most appealed. Politics are after all concerned to build utopias, and this is especially true of left-wing politics in the hopeful early 1920s. Poplar's politicians 'thought the world was on the turn',¹⁶² and were offering their constituents the chance to remake it in the image of their desires. Such an idealism appealed to idealised models of social life: ideals like the neighbourliness people imagined in villages.

In a sense then, neighbourliness was a local frame of awareness in Poplar which affected its politics more strongly than its social life. In this way, Williams's stress on the importance of the actual social relations of community neglects the political relevance of widely held ideals of social relations, and Seabrook is correct to suggest that it is 'the idea of neighbourhood' (my emphasis) which is most relevant to politics. Seabrook is incorrect however in his notion that working-class people actually lived according to that idea; social relations and communal sensibilities are not one and the same thing.

161. IHT, interview with Mrs Garland, no date.

162. B. Keefe, Better Times (London, 1985), preface (unpaginated).

Cultural sensibilities cannot be tied down to material and social conditions alone; although they are expressed through social relations, sensibilities are not reducible to them, and the concluding chapter discusses the implications of that for Geertz's theorisation of culture. The relationship between neighbourhood and polity is theoretically as well as historically complex.

The concern of this chapter has been to clarify the nature of Poplar's loyalty to its Labour Party, and it has stressed their shared culture; the communal sensibility of neighbourliness was clearly central to Poplar Labour Party's massive local support. That cultural mores are in some way important for loyalty to the Labour Party is not a new observation; McKibbin too emphasises the shared sense of being working-class held by the early Labour Party nationally and its supporters.¹⁶³ So how did Poplar's culture specifically contribute to its Party's radicalism? Its exuberance and emphasis on local needs contributed to its Labour Party's defiance of outsiders, be they the Ministry of Health or the London Labour Party. But other areas of London -- and no doubt other parts of the country -- could be rowdy too, and nor was neighbourliness or local patriotism confined to Poplar alone. The next chapter turns to a local frame of awareness much more exclusive to Poplar, and argues that it was the ultimate source of Poplar's 1921 rebellion: the church.

163. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, p.xiv.

CHAPTER V

`THE ESSENTIALLY RELIGIOUS NATURE OF THE REVOLT':
RELIGION AND POLITICS IN 1920s POPLAR

In 1922, the year after Poplar's councillors had gone to gaol for spending all the rates on the relief of their poverty-stricken constituents, a new curate arrived at the local church of St Michael and All Angels. 'The thing which struck me forcibly on coming to Poplar,' he wrote later, 'was the essentially religious nature of the revolt which was taking place',¹ and he was especially impressed with the quotation from the Bible with which Poplar Labour Party opened their major defence of Poplarism; it was from the first chapter of James and read 'pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction'.²

Poplar Labour Party was overtly Christian in its beliefs,³ and in this it was apparently unique among the radical localities of the inter-war period. In his study of three other 'little Moscows', as they were dubbed at the time, MacIntyre found religion to be important to the politics of only one -- Mardy in south Wales -- and even there it was in decline during the 1920s because of massive social conflict which reduced the credibility of the nonconformist faith in universal brotherhood and because of a sustained attack on religion from local Communist activists.⁴ In contrast, in 1923 Poplar Labour

1. J.B. Groser, Politics and Persons (London, 1949), p.22.

2. PMBC, Guilty and Proud of It: Poplar's Answer (London, 1922), p.1.

3. for this reason, and because of a complete lack of sources, this chapter does not discuss the other religious beliefs present in Poplar.

4. S. MacIntyre, Little Moscows: Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain (London, 1980), pp.157-60.

Party was moved to inscribe a prayer at the entrance to the Town Hall:

Our Father, we pray before thee this morning for our borough, the borough of our love and pride. Bind our citizens not by the love of money but by the glow of neighbourly goodwill, by the thrill of common possessions ... Grant to our own generation the vision of our borough fair as she might be; a borough of justice, where none shall prey on others; a borough of plenty, where vice and poverty shall cease to fester; a borough of brotherhood, where all success shall be founded on service, and honour shall be given to nobleness alone; a borough of peace, where order shall not rest on force, but on the love of all for the borough, the great mother of the common life and weal.⁵

Poplar Labour Party expressed its ideals -- justice, plenty, brotherhood and peace -- through prayers as well as in manifestoes, and in 1927 the Plebs League commented on the crucial role of religion in the leadership of the General Strike in Poplar.⁶

Christian faith was common in Poplar; Christianity was part of the local culture shared by both councillors and inhabitants, and shaped their view of the world. It was a communal sensibility. One resident recalls:

I can remember how great a part religion played in the lives of the Poplar people years ago, and there was a wide variety of places of worship as well as outdoor services in the streets. I remember All Hallows, St Saviour's, St Stephen's, Trinity Church, Wesleyan, St Frideswide's, the Salvation Army, Poplar and Bromley Tabernacle, Bromley St Leonard's, the Catholic Church in Canton Street and Poplar Church. There were also small mission halls of every denomination.⁷

5. Transport and General Workers' Union, Record, January 1923, p.6.

6. R.W. Postgate, E. Wilkinson and J.F. Horrabin, A Workers' History of the Great Strike (London, 1927), p.41. Also mentioned in connection with the importance of religion were St Albans, Wigan and Preston, but none of these localities qualify as 'little Moscows' since all were politically moderate. In his study of Preston between 1880 and 1940, for example, Savage notes that left-wing groups were very weak in the locality: M. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940 (Cambridge, 1987), p.x.

7. J. Blake, Memories of Old Poplar (London, 1977), pp.5-6.

In 1922, 'the churches [in Poplar] still had good congregations, and a good mixture of dockers, railwaymen and manual workers of all kinds'.⁸ Like the religiosity of its Labour Party, this widespread Christian belief among Poplar people was unusual for the inter-war period.⁹ Historians have argued that religious faith had been in decline in Britain at least since the late nineteenth century and that, in any case, the loyalty of the urban working class to organised religion had never been won.¹⁰ This chapter explores Poplar's exceptional religious faith and its role in the politics of the place; it is the fourth and final communal sensibility of the locality's culture to be discussed in the thesis, and, as in other chapters, a fifth sensibility of gender will be considered throughout.

The chapter opens with a brief description of the situation in which the churches found themselves in the 1920s; their declining influence is described and their responses are examined. This provides a context for the study of Poplar which follows. A distinction is made between religious faith and churchgoing, and the former is assessed in Poplar first. The chapter then turns to organised religion, the local character of which is elucidated through an examination of the reasons for the increase in Poplar's congregations in the 1920s. The connection between the churches and Poplar Labour Party is then examined and its consequences described; it is suggested that the religious conviction of Poplar Labour Party was the catalyst of its rebellion in 1921 and the

8. Groser, Politics and Persons, p.36. This is confirmed by the many interviews with residents of the Isle of Dogs in D. Coleman and E. Hostettler, The Anglican Church on the Isle of Dogs (Isle of Dogs, 1984).

9. Unusual but not unique; in Preston the Anglican church was growing until the mid-1930s: Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics, pp.117-24.

10. R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700 (Oxford, 1977); A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (London, 1976); K.S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England (London, 1963); H. McLeod, Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City (London, 1974).

reason why it was Poplar and nowhere else which had a Board of Guardians who felt passionately enough to go to gaol for their principles. Finally, the hostility of some Labour activists to the church and the relationship of the churches to right-wing politics in the borough is examined and some conclusions drawn concerning the nature of the Christian impact on Poplar Labour Party's politics.

Religion in the 1920s

The embattled position in which organised religion found itself in the 1920s can be summarised by a comparison of the role of religion in the two major surveys of life and labour in London. The first of these, by Charles Booth, culminated in the early 1900s with a series of volumes entitled 'Religious Influences'.¹¹ These summarised the various characters of the districts of the metropolis by drawing quick sketches of the people and their habits. Booth felt the key to these portraits was the extent to which religion had (or, more usually, had not) gained a foothold in the locality, and hence the title of the series. It was the church -- and the mission hall, the chapel and the settlement -- which appeared to him to be the most critical factor in the shaping of the culture and life-style of each area, for to Booth religion was a civilising force which could reform the slums both morally and spiritually.¹² But even as Booth was writing, the relevance of religion to social reform policy was lessening because religious faith itself was being challenged. The work of Darwin and of textual critics of the Bible such as Baur and Strauss were casting doubt on the veracity of many of the most basic tenets of Christian faith, and indeed Booth himself, like many other Victorian intellectuals, underwent a spiritual crisis in the face of these

11. C. Booth, Life and Labour in London Series 3: Religious Influences, 7 vols (London, 1902-03).

12. H.W. Pfautz, Charles Booth on the City: Physical Patterns and Social Structure (London, 1967), p.73.

revelations and for a time preferred Positivism to Christianity.¹³

The second social survey of London was published during the 1930s. The director of the New Survey of London Life and Labour, Hubert Llewellyn-Smith, had worked with Booth and wanted to make the new survey directly comparable to the old. By dint of much statistical juggling he managed to achieve this in the quantitative indices of his study; but the conceptual apparatus he brought to bear on the subject was far removed from Booth's religious framework. Llewellyn-Smith's account was structured by the assumptions of a social policy maker who relied on the knowledge of secular policy expert.¹⁴ Far from providing the central explanatory framework for the condition of the people, religion in the New Survey occupied a mere two paragraphs in a chapter on sports, games and hobbies.¹⁵

By the 1930s then, Christianity was no longer the basis of public discourse on social policy and reform, or of any other intellectual debate outside theology itself. Arnold Bennett wrote in 1929 that:

the present situation is that the intelligentsia has sat back, shrugged its shoulders, given a sigh of relief, and decreed, tacitly or by plain statement, the conclusion of the argument ... the intelligentsia, with a continually increasing number of followers, is in effect for the time being godless.¹⁶

13. Pfautz, Charles Booth on the City, p.9. For a discussion of the intellectual crisis of religious faith in the late nineteenth century, see A. Vincent and R. Plant, Politics, Philosophy and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists (Oxford, 1984), pp.6-17.

14. This is not to suggest that the moral vision had entirely disappeared from Llewellyn-Smith or from policy experts more generally: P. Thane, Foundations of the Welfare State (London, 1982), p.11; S. Yeo, 'Working-Class Association, Private Capital, Welfare and the State in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Social Work, Welfare and the State, edited by N. Parry, M. Rustin and C. Satyamurti (London, 1979), pp.48-71.

15. New Survey, IX, pp.75-6.

16. A. Bennett, The Religious Interregnum (London, 1929), p.10.

And if Christianity had lost its hegemony over the intelligentsia, so too it was believed to have lost its hold on ordinary people. Bennett went on to claim that 'at this present, religion is exercising less influence in favour of the right conduct of life than in any other previous period in all the annals of Christianity' (p.23). The churches shared this analysis,¹⁷ and their responses to their perceived decline in importance will now be examined.

The churches in the 1920s

Investigations like that of Booth into the godless urban masses had emphasised the irrelevance of the church to vast numbers of people well before the 1920s, and the late nineteenth century saw various efforts to remedy this state of affairs: parliamentary pressure groups, evangelist campaigns, churchbuilding programmes, welfare work.¹⁸ These attempts to win the hearts and minds of non-believers continued into the twentieth century, but in many ways the churches in the 1920s were as distant as ever from their potential congregations.

In the 1920s the churches were more concerned with their own internal affairs than with methods of integrating themselves into society; many clergy refused to contaminate their religious activities by contact with secular issues. Nonconformist evangelists believed that saving souls for the next world was more important than becoming concerned with this, and the issues most important to the Church of England in the inter-war years were the pensions and pay of clergy and the supply of candidates for Holy Orders.¹⁹ In a rare reform meant to remedy the

17. for a discussion of the self-accusatory rhetoric of churches, see J. Cox, The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930 (Oxford, 1982).

18. The differing strategies adopted by each denomination are outlined in Inglis, The Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England.

19. Crockford Prefaces: The Editor Looks Back (Oxford, 1947), p.x.

isolation of the Church of England from society by increasing its lay participation, in 1919 a 'bold experiment in local self-government' was undertaken and Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) elected by congregations to help run the everyday affairs of parish churches were established;²⁰ but in 1925 the electoral rolls of PCCs in London were a much smaller proportion of the population than elsewhere because of hostility towards them from clergy and the Bishop of London. The churches in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in London, remained remote and inward-looking institutions.

There was however one aspect of church practice in the 1920s which was breaking with this long-established aloofness of church from people, and that was a much greater commitment to welfare work and social reform. As early as 1862, F.D. Maurice had argued for a rational and nondogmatic faith which recognised that all of the material world was part of God's creation and that Christians therefore should be as much concerned about the condition of this world as with the next.²¹ After the Great War Maurice's 'social gospel', as it was known, was widely accepted, and some clergy in all denominations believed the churches should be concerned with contemporary social issues,²² claiming too that churches were relevant to the social problems of the day because of the ethical guidelines for social action which Christianity provided. The result was that in the 1920s nonconformist denominations were advocating industrial peace and compulsory arbitration for workplace disputes, an anti-slum campaign and an end to unemployment.²³ The Church of England held a Conference on Economics, Politics and Citizenship in 1924 which passed

20. Crockford Prefaces, pp.40-41.

21. P. d'A. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England (New Jersey, 1968), pp.11-13.

22. Cox, The English Churches, p.273; G.C. Binyon, The Christian Socialist Movement in England: An Introduction to the Study of Its History (London, 1931).

23. S. Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics (London, 1975), p.181.

vague resolutions protesting against poverty and unemployment (and was dismissed by those in authority as an unrepresentative gathering of cranks).²⁴ And during the General Strike a number of eminent dignitaries from several denominations called for compromise by both sides in the dispute.²⁵

One of the major sources of this socially concerned Christianity was Christian Socialism. Since many of Poplar's clergy were Christian Socialists, its arguments will now be briefly described. Christian Socialism began as an organised movement in 1877 with the founding of Stewart Headlam's Guild of St Matthew, although its theological inspiration came from the Oxford Movement of a generation before and the writings of men like Maurice. Following Maurice, it explained that since God had created the world and he was everywhere in it, Christians should work to build his kingdom on earth by remedying social injustice; often the Sermon on the Mount was invoked as the principles of action. This theological argument embraced all nonconformists and Anglicans.²⁶ Some Anglicans and all Roman Catholics went further and used the sacraments as proof of God's presence in the world in their belief that the communion bread and wine literally became Christ's body and blood and that elaborate ritual celebrated his actual existence in the world. The causes of the revival of interest in these ideas in the post-war period cannot be detailed here, but clergymen's reactions to the horrors of the Great War and to the new industrial and political situation of the period were probably instrumental.²⁷

There was therefore a theological justification for the involvement of the churches in social and political matters; there was also a feeling that such involvement would increase the credibility of the church and win it

24. Crockford Prefaces, p.46.

25. M. Morris, The General Strike (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.253.

26. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival, pp.86-88.

27. see S. Mews, 'The Churches', in Morris, The General Strike, pp.318-37.

large congregations. Involvement in secular society on behalf of the deprived was seen by some as the salvation of religion in Britain.

But only by some. The churches were divided bodies in the 1920s, and it will therefore be necessary to ascertain carefully the character of Poplar's churches.

Churchgoers in the 1920s

Having sketched the dual character of the churches in 1920s Britain -- some clergy remote from and others deeply involved in society and its problems -- the discussion now turns to their potential congregations. Were the minority of radical clergy striving to act as the nation's ethical conscience and pronouncing on contemporary issues correct in their assessment that only by becoming more relevant to social issues could the churches survive as popular institutions? Did people want a religious conscience?

Many historians have argued that they did not. They detect a growing scepticism towards religious truth in British society as a whole from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and the embodiment of this secularisation trend among the intelligentsia like Llewellyn-Smith and Booth has already been noted. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley have traced its course among the population at large using church attendance statistics.²⁸ These show that the numbers of people attending church in Britain, after growing in the late nineteenth century, dipped during the First World War, recovered somewhat and then went into a fairly steady decline from the mid-1920s onwards. Society seemed to be rejecting the church in the inter-war years just as the majority of churchmen had turned their backs on the social, economic and political issues of their day.

However, the notion of secularisation as represented by

28. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, figure 2.2, p.29.

churchgoing statistics has been heavily criticised.²⁹ Clifford Geertz, for example, has argued that the relationship between religious faith and churchgoing is a complex one, and he suggests that, since faith precedes its institutionalisation in churches both analytically and temporally, the relationship between religious belief and churchgoing should be critically interrogated rather than 'explained' by a secularisation concept which does not distinguish between the two.³⁰ Despite its declining church attendance, the inter-war period saw a revival of interest in spiritual matters, with Beauty, Truth and Goodness often substituted for God in continuing attempts at 'communicating with the infinite',³¹ and, as a concept, secularisation has little power to explain this.

Some historians have recognised this critique of the secularisation idea and try to offer specific reasons for the marked decline in churchgoing during the twentieth century.³² Geertz's insight has thus been echoed in attempted explanations of the decline of church attendance. But his argument can also provide a framework for problematising the appeal of churches to such congregations as they did attract. What were the churches' strategies and strengths? Why did they appeal to anyone? McLeod has argued that poverty-stricken areas like Poplar were highly resistant to Victorian missionary efforts, as

29. for a critique of secularisation theory, see Cox, English Churches in Secular Society, pp.8-18; S. Yeo, Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis (London, 1976), pp.11-12.

30. C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, edited by M. Banton (London, 1966), pp.1-46.

31. Bennett, The Religious Interregnum, p.13. According to its back cover, Bennett's pamphlet was published in a series entitled 'Affirmations', which attempted 'an inductive approach to religion based on the pursuit of Truth, Beauty and Goodness'. See also the discussion of the popularity of spiritualism and religion in R. Graves and A. Hodge, The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-39 (London, 1940), pp.201-08.

32. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England; Cox, The English Churches in a Secular Society; Yeo, Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis.

much from resentment at the wealthy society of which the church was a bulwark and its members representatives as from the impossibility of considering questions of God and Eternity when the existence of even the next meal was in doubt.³³ The question in Poplar then is not secularisation, not why the churches were in decline, but why they won any congregations at all.

Two issues relevant to a discussion of religion in Poplar have emerged from this section then: the exact character of local churches, and the ways in which they managed to attract congregations. The next section considers these questions.

Religious faith and churchgoing in 1920s Poplar

This section discusses the nature of religion in Poplar and begins to make some connections to Poplar Labour Party. Firstly the extent of religious faith is explored. Then the degree of churchgoing and the specific ways in which certain clergy managed to persuade people to institutionalise their faith through church ritual are analysed; this will give an insight into the character of organised religion in the borough.

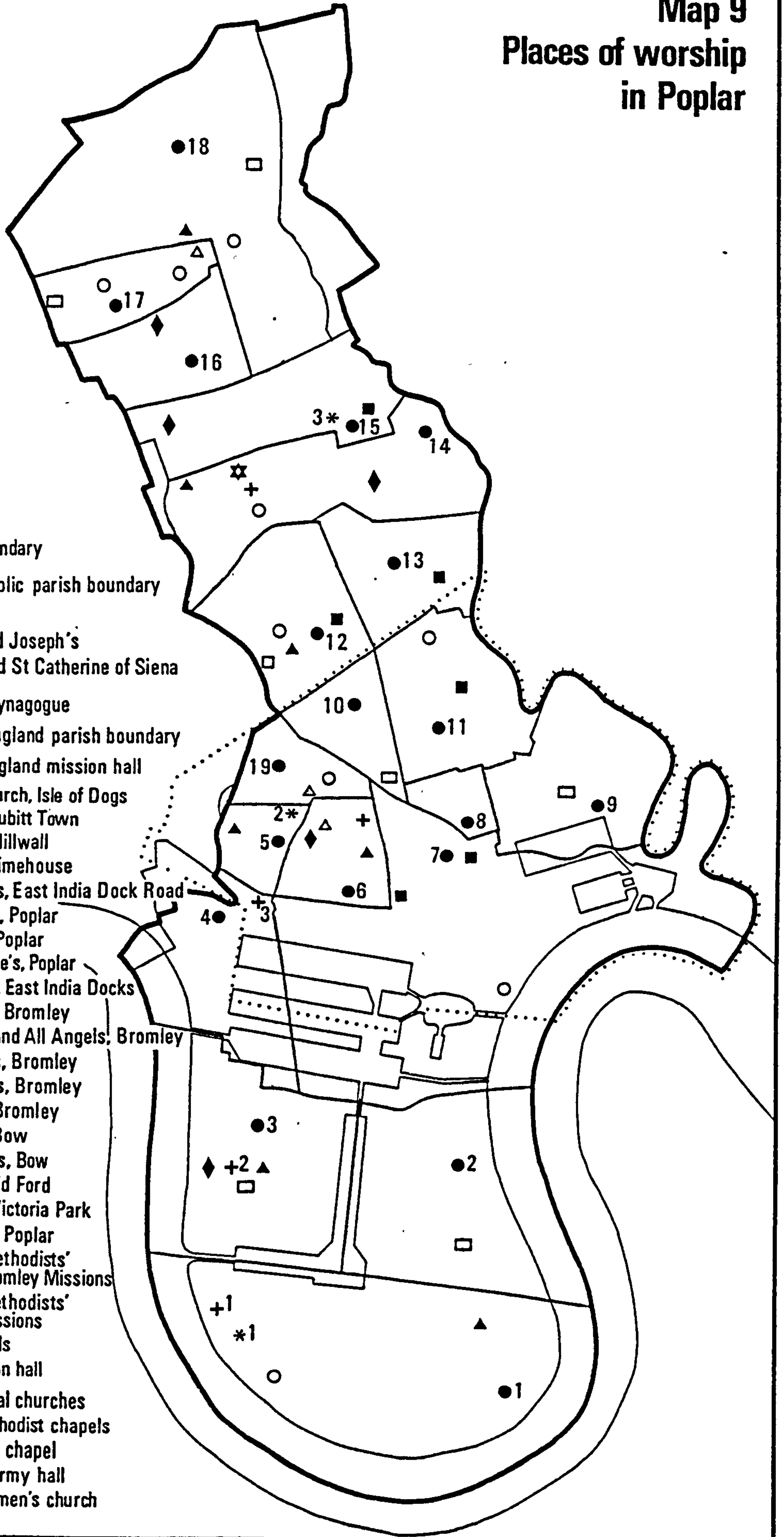
Popular faith in Poplar

The Christian ethic was well-known in Poplar. It was inculcated in schools but more important were the Sunday Schools, to which all parents sent their offspring regardless of their own beliefs. This was probably a strategy to get some peace and quiet on one afternoon of the week at least, and as the map overleaf shows, parents were spoilt for choice for where to despatch their kids; there were a large number of places of worship in Poplar, and virtually every one had a Sunday School attached. The Schools often used a form of bribery to keep the loyalty of their young potential believers; the 'rapture' of lantern

33. McLeod, Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City, pp.42-3.

Map 9 Places of worship in Poplar

- borough boundary
- ... Roman Catholic parish boundary
- *1 S Edmund's
- *2 SS Mary and Joseph's
- *3 Our Lady and St Catherine of Siena
- ☆ Bow Road Synagogue
- Church of England parish boundary
- Church of England mission hall
- 1 Christ's Church, Isle of Dogs
- 2 St John's, Cubitt Town
- 3 St Luke's, Millwall
- 4 St Anne's, Limehouse
- 5 St Stephen's, East India Dock Road
- 6 St Matthias, Poplar
- 7 All Saints', Poplar
- 8 St Frideswide's, Poplar
- 9 All Hallow's, East India Docks
- 10 St Gabriel's, Bromley
- 11 St Michael and All Angels, Bromley
- 12 All Hallow's, Bromley
- 13 St Andrew's, Bromley
- 14 St Mary's, Bromley
- 15 St Mary's, Bow
- 16 St Stephen's, Bow
- 17 St Paul's, Old Ford
- 18 St Mark's, Victoria Park
- 19 St Saviour's, Poplar
- ▲ Wesleyan Methodists' Poplar and Bromley Missions
- △ Wesleyan Methodists' Seamen's Missions
- Baptist chapels
- Baptist mission hall
- ◆ Congregational churches
- Primitive Methodist chapels
- + 1 Presbyterian chapel
- + 2 Salvation Army hall
- + 3 Danish Seamen's church



slide shows were especially popular with children.³⁴ More effective were prizes offered for regular attendance; children would go anywhere regularly if a Christmas feast was offered as a reward.³⁵

It is doubtful that Sunday Schools managed to instil into their young charges many of the finer points of Christian theology, although some began a lifelong commitment to the church there.³⁶ Here is an eye-witness account of a Sunday School class in the working-class south London borough of Greenwich:

Three hundred boys and girls all below the age of ten were seated in long rows, kicking their heels, shoving each other, and excitedly talking ...

The leader blew his whistle. 'That's the whistle, children. Stop your talking, you. Do you hear? I'm talking to YOU. Do you want to be sent out?'

'Yus.' But he stays.

By dint of much exertion and exhortation and approaches of adults from behind to jerk a troublesome youngster out of his seat and separate him from his cronies (a act which causes the rest of the crowd to stand and look towards the centre of excitement) a measure of quiet is secured. The state of affairs resembles very much the condition of a man trying to avoid, but on the verge of, a sneeze.

A song, 'Jesus Loves the Little Children' is sung.³⁷

The author of that account nonetheless detected a widespread if hazy belief in Christian ethics in Greenwich (p.212), and it seems that a vague Christian belief was held by most people in Poplar too. They were 'hundred per cent Christians but not churchgoers', in the words of a man born in Poplar before the Great War.³⁸ One interviewee remembered his mother never went to church but prayed regularly to 'the Supreme Being',³⁹ and Edgar Lansbury

34. E.M. Page, 'No Green Pastures I', East London Papers, 9 (1966), 27-40 (p.37).

35. interview with Mr Franklin by the author, 22.6.1987.

36. interview with Mrs Garland by the IHT, no date.

37. E.W. Bakke, The Unemployed Man: A Social Study (London, 1933), p.205.

38. Family Life Oral History archive, University of Essex, interview 070, p.16.

39. interview with Mr Barker by the author, 22.6.1987.

considered that in Poplar 'the pastor and the vicar still represent a sort of undefined goodness in the eyes of thousands who never enter a chapel or a church'.⁴⁰ Given this common vaguely religious sentiment, it is very unlikely that the mass of Poplar people would condemn George Lansbury's flights of religious rhetoric; the overt religiosity of Poplar Labour Party was clearly not antithetical to local beliefs.

The pervasive sensibility of Christian morality found its best expression in the neighbourliness of Poplar people; as the last chapter argued, being a good neighbour, loving thy neighbour, was as much a moral obligation as a material strategy for survival in Poplar, and chapter IV argued that the same morality was at the heart of Poplar Labour Party too. The convergence of a working-class, socialist and Christian morality based on the ethic of loving thy neighbour as thyself can best be seen in the case of Muriel Lester. The basis of her radical politics was that 'our neighbour is anyone who is in need -- anyone who has suffered at the hands of others',⁴¹ and who therefore had a right to help from Christians; the same belief in the right of the needy to aid informed Poplar Labour Party's statist welfarism, and local neighbourhood life.

There was then a pervasive Christian morality in Poplar which can be connected in a general way to the local Labour Party's politics. But did religion have more of an impact on the Party than just a moral impulse? In order to answer this, local organised religion must be explored. Following Geertz's arguments about the institutionalisation of faith, the extent of churchgoing in the borough will now be examined and then its specific causes; this will reveal the nature of the churches in Poplar, and may offer some clues as to the sources of the Party's religiosity.

40. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury. My Father (London, 1934), p.11.

41. M. Lester and A. Pullen, Shall I Pull My Weight? Christian Citizenship for Youth (London, 1936), p.14.

Church attendance in Poplar

The last comprehensive survey of church attendance in London was held in 1902, but there are other sources available from which estimates of church attendance can be culled for the inter-war years. These vary between denominations.

Taking Nonconformist chapels first, membership figures were recorded annually and published in the denominations's yearbook. In Poplar, the total membership of Baptist and Congregationalist chapels fell from 833 in 1919 to 775 in 1929, a decrease of 7.0 per cent. This was mainly due to the loss of two thirds of the membership at the Baptist Cotton Street chapel,⁴² and the closure of the Congregational Church in Harley Street, Bow, in 1927 after a steady loss of members since 1919.⁴³ The growth of other Congregational churches somewhat compensated for the demise of Cotton Street and Harley Street chapels, especially Trinity which almost doubled its membership from 55 to 113 over the decade.⁴⁴ Statistical data for attendance at Wesleyan chapels is lacking, but Poplar's congregations appear to have been growing and almost certainly compensated for the overall decline of the Baptists and Congregationalists. The six Wesleyan chapels of the Poplar and Bow mission expanded during the 1920s under the leadership of several dynamic ministers, especially the Superintendent William Lax, the Rev W.E. Clapham at Bow and Simeon Cole at Old Ford.⁴⁵ The many non-denominational

42. Baptist Union, The Baptist Handbook, 11 vols (London, 1919-29). The chapel lost 55 members.

43. Congregational Union of England and Wales, Congregational Yearbook, 11 vols (London, 1919-29).

44. Congregational Yearbook.

45. W.E. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow (London, 1938); L. Farmer, The Bow Story (London, 1965); W.H. Lax, Lax. His Book: The Autobiography of Lax of Poplar (London, 1937).

chapels in Poplar were also particularly popular in the 1920s.⁴⁶

Church membership involved active commitment to the church, so nonconformist statistics of membership tend to underestimate actual attendance at chapels;⁴⁷ however, as nonconformist places of worship did not use the parochial system, it is impossible to estimate what percentage of local people these membership figures represent. With one or two spectacular exceptions, it does appear that the nonconformist congregation was at the very least holding its own in Poplar, and most probably expanding a little. This was contrary to the national trend of nonconformist church membership, which had begun to decline in 1906 and continued to do so as a percentage of the population at least until the Second World War.⁴⁸

Turning to the Church of England, attendance at individual Anglican churches was published in parish magazines, recorded either by the numbers of people in congregations or by the numbers taking communion each Sunday. Since the survival of parish magazines is patchy, Anglican statistics are less comprehensive than nonconformist records. It is nonetheless possible to detect Poplar's pattern of attendance at Church of England services. Although in 1920 the incumbent of St Peter's felt that he was only just holding the line,⁴⁹ and in 1925 the vicar of All Hallows' in East India Dock Road told his parishioners rather testily that if the church burned down on a Sunday morning only twenty of them would be there to

46. C. Grant, Farthing Bundles (Bromley-by-Bow, 1930), p.62.

47. At Trinity Congregational Church on the East India Dock Road for example, membership was eighty-five, but attendance at services averaged about a hundred and the men's club attracted two hundred to each meeting: THLHL, manuscript diary of William Dick, passim.

48. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, table 2.4, p.31.

49. East London Church Fund, East London Church Chronicle, 22 no.2 (1920), p.12.

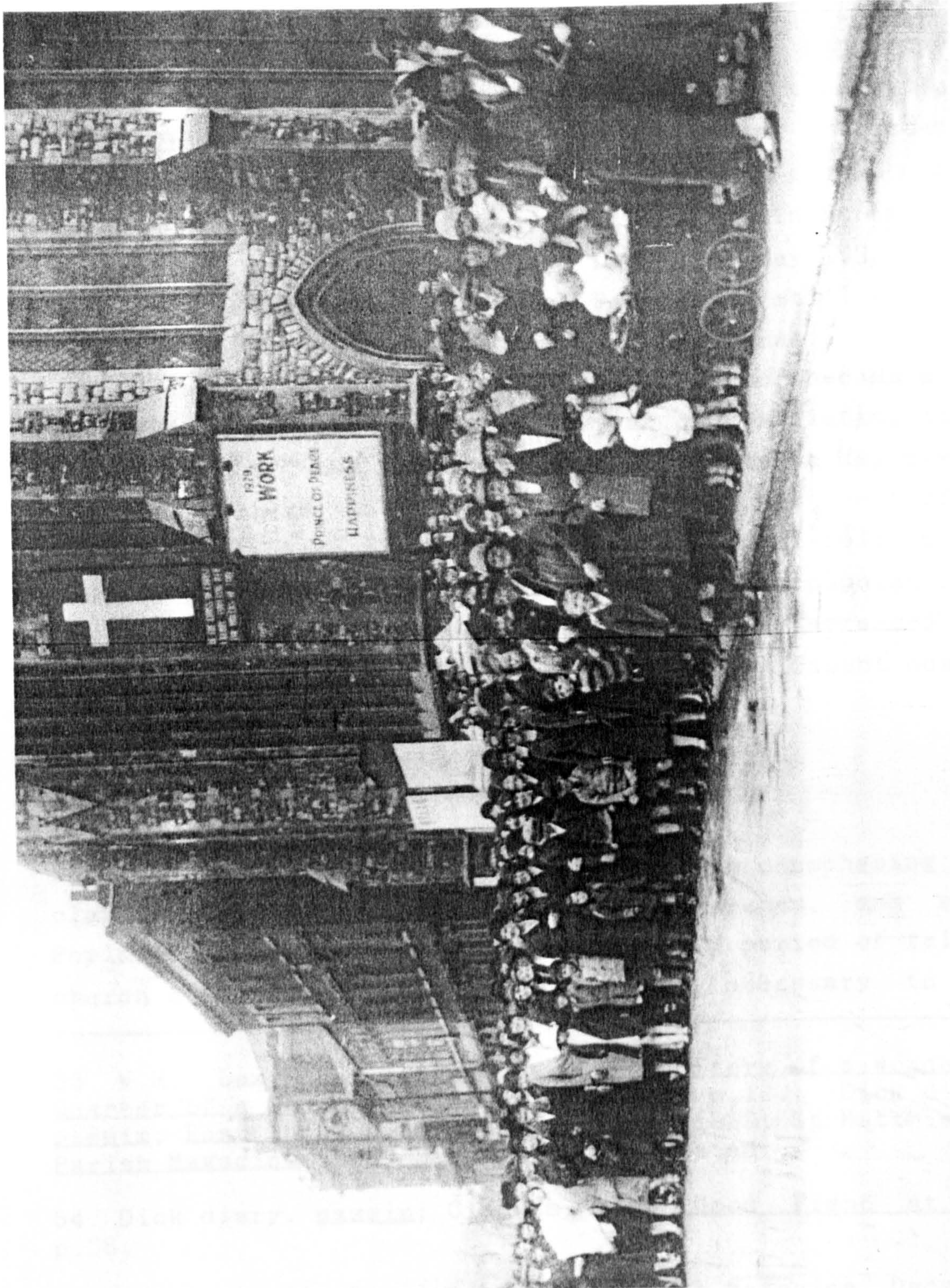
see it,⁵⁰ all the other Anglican churches were remarking on -- indeed glorying in -- increased attendances and growing numbers of communicants. This is particularly remarkable towards the end of the decade when Anglican communicant numbers nationally were falling.⁵¹ All Hallows' in Bromley experienced an increase of over two hundred in its annual number of acts of communion between 1927 and 1929, while the annual total of communicants at St Matthias's in Poplar grew by a thousand between 1925 and 1926, with an average of two hundred people attending the Sunday evening service. 1925 saw St Michael and All Angels reporting rising attendances at its daily Mass, the number of communicants at Easter 1928 was the highest St Saviour's in Poplar had ever seen, and in 1927 and again in 1928 St Stephen's in Bow noted steadily rising numbers of Sunday communicants.⁵² Against the national trend, Poplar's Anglican churches were increasing their congregations during the 1920s.

Organised religion was not in decline in 1920s Poplar then; indeed, given the borough's falling population, the increase in its congregations is even more impressive. Large numbers of people were going to church, and the churches were for many an important part of their lives. On Monday afternoons, for example, nearly all places of worship held women's meetings, and the streets of the borough must have become strangely quiet as a thousand women went to Lax's church on East India Dock Road, another hundred found their way to Trinity Congregational, five hundred more to Bruce Road church and three hundred to the

50. THLHL, All Hallows' East India Dock Road, Parish Magazine, August 1925, unpaginated.

51. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, table A1, pp.128-29.

52. THLHL, All Hallows' Bromley-by-Bow, Parish Magazine, March 1929 and March 1930; East London Church Chronicle, 38 no.4 (1926), p.4; THLHL, St Michael and All Angels, Parish Magazine, September 1925; THLHL, St Saviour's, Parish Magazine, April 1928; THLHL, St Stephen's Bow, Parish Magazine, 1927-28 passim. All parish magazines are unpaginated.



Members of the women's meeting at Lax's chapel in 1929

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

54. *Diary of Mrs. G. G. G. G.* 1929

55. All Hallows' Festival, 1927, unpaginated; 56. *Saviour's*, 1927, unpaginated

56. *East London Church Chronicle*, 30 no. 4 (1928) p. 10; *Saviour's*, 1928, unpaginated; *Diary of Mrs. G. G. G. G.*, 1928, unpaginated; *Diary of Mrs. G. G. G. G.*, 1928, unpaginated

meeting at St Matthias.⁵³ Men's meetings were less popular and were held on various nights of the week and so did not have the same impact on Poplar's social routine as the gatherings of women; even so, two hundred men each regularly went to Trinity Congregational's men's meeting and to the Wesleyan Clapham's meeting for them at Bow.⁵⁴ All Hallows' Bromley Christmas tea and social attracted two hundred and fifty people, and on a more elevated note, seven hundred men and women participated in St Saviour's procession in honour of Our Lady in May 1927.⁵⁵ And Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festivals still attracted many who never entered a church at other times.

Organised religion could not be described as a mass movement in Poplar. St Matthias was congratulating itself on attracting two hundred people to its Sunday evening services in 1925, but this was a mere 4.7 per cent of its parish population; St Saviour's PCC electoral roll in 1926 had 406 names on it, or 4.4 per cent of the population of its parish, and its growth to 662 by 1929 increased that percentage only to 7.2.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, significant numbers of people participated in Poplar church life.

The causes of church attendance in Poplar

Detailing the reasons for Poplar people's churchgoing will clarify the nature of the local churches, and since Poplar's congregations were growing in a period of falling church attendances elsewhere it seems necessary to look

53. W.H. Lax, Lax of Poplar: The Story of a Wonderful Quarter of a Century (London, 1927), p.190; Dick diary, passim; East London Advertiser, 2.11.1929; St Matthias's, Parish Magazine, December 1927, unpaginated.

54. Dick diary, passim; Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.36.

55. All Hallows' Bromley-by-Bow, Parish Magazine, December 1927, unpaginated; St Saviour's, Parish Magazine, June 1927, unpaginated.

56. East London Church Chronicle, 38 no.4 (1926) p.6; St Saviour's, Parish Magazine, March 1926 and March 1929, unpaginated. Parish populations can be found in Crockford's Clerical Directory 1926 (Oxford, 1927).

for the causes of this increase in processes specific to Poplar. The last chapter discussed the idea that appeals to local sensibilities and social bonding can account for the popularity of an organisation, and it will now be suggested that the same argument applies to Poplar's churches also; they were successful to the degree that they could tap aspects of local culture and practice. Those who adapted to Poplar made most impact upon its people and won relatively large congregations; those who remained outsiders fell victim to the general apathy toward the churches.

This theoretical stress upon the local rooting of successful institutions is supported by the evidence of a lack of interest among Poplar churchgoers in remote denominational hierarchies. They went to chapels and churches to hear individual ministers, not to express sectarian allegiances, and the diverse pattern of success and failure within denominations which the previous subsection described demonstrates this; popularity in Poplar seems to have depended more upon the individual preacher than on denominational characteristics. The local preference for non-denominational chapels has already been mentioned, and other churches were known not by their religious affiliation but by the names of their preachers, benefactors or even their politics: 'Lax's', 'Kelly's', 'Green's' and the 'red church'.⁵⁷ This uninterest in the wider institutionalisation of religion meant that the pronouncements of clerical outsiders, no matter how powerful, were ignored by Poplar believers. When Cardinal Bourne decreed the 1926 General Strike to be a sin, for example, Poplar's Catholic dockers continued to a man to remain out and Poplar councillor John Scurr, a Catholic, protested at Bourne's edict.⁵⁸ Similarly, when John Groser, that new curate at St Michael and All Angels' who

57. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.89; Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.105; Dr William's Library, untitled Trinity Congregational Church pamphlet, (Poplar, 1952); interview with Mr Barker.

58. G.P. McEntee, The Social Catholic Movement in Great Britain (New York, 1927), pp.302-08.

was so impressed with the religious nature of Poplar Labour Party's struggle, came into conflict with the Bishop of London over his political activism, his congregation backed Groser against the Bishop. Groser had won their loyalty by being shaped by them, by being formed in the local mould:

An Anglican priest converted to Socialism, not by the dialectics of doctors, but by his flock, Father Groser met it in a temper and attitude of mind neither alien to his faith nor a mere excrescence on it. He loved what his people loved, and hated what they hated. It was natural that he should participate, a member and a leader, in the corporate goals and activities in which love and hate found an expression.⁵⁹

In what ways then did the churches appeal to Poplar inhabitants' predilections, their hates and loves, many of which the previous chapter described?

One reason for the churches' appeal was status. Churchgoing had always been more of a middle-class habit than a working-class one, and the closure of Harley Street Congregational Church in 1927 can be explained by its appeal to middle-class believers. Congregationalism was traditionally a bourgeois denomination and Harley Street was typical in this respect; one third of its members were white-collar workers and they lived in the more exclusive roads of Bow, as the map on the next page makes clear.⁶⁰ Map 8 showed that this was the area where the majority of people who left Poplar in the 1920s lived, and in about 1919 Harley Street already had sixteen of its 131 members living outside Bow in places like Goodmayes, Leytonstone and Muswell Hill.⁶¹ Its rapid decline in membership can be attributed to the emigration of its members to distant

59. R.H. Tawney in the Foreword to Groser, Politics and Persons, pp.8-9.

60. GLRO, marriage register of Harley Street Congregational Church. The occupations of the grooms of the fifteen marriages which occurred between 1919 and the church's closure were analysed.

61. GLRO, membership list of Harley Street Congregational Church, about 1919.

Map 10 Residence of Harley Street Congregational Church members



- Harley Street church
- address of church member

Source: Greater London Record Office , Harley Street Congregational church membership list (1919?)

suburbia.⁶² But if its bourgeois congregation was the source of Harley Street's closure, the middle-class overtones of churchgoing could be a boon to churches whose congregations were too poor to move away, for church attendance of a Sunday was one way in which that desire for social superiority discussed in the previous chapter could be satisfied. As an East Ender remembers of his road in the 1920s,

there were some right characters. The people at the end house was very religious, used to go to church and all the rest of it. So that they tried to keep themselves a step -- a wee bit higher than the kids round the corner.⁶³

To go to church was to make a claim to a respectable, higher status lifestyle; indeed the snobbery among some congregations could be quite intimidating.⁶⁴

Church attendance could increase status too because to become involved in a church was to assert membership of the wider sphere of public affairs; the churches were part of the civic life of Poplar. The borough council was invited as a body to the services of various churches;⁶⁵ churchmen were invited to be presidents of local bodies like the Chamber of Commerce and sat on committees like that established in 1920 to sell London County Council Housing Bonds;⁶⁶ local businesses advertised in parish magazines, gave money to church funds and donated goods to church bazaars;⁶⁷ local masonic lodges held services in Poplar

62. This was the explanation offered by the local newspaper: East London Advertiser, 3.7.1926.

63. R. Samuel, East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding (London, 1981), pp.244-45.

64. interview with Mrs Hicks by the IHT, no date. She went to All Saints and found no-one would talk to her.

65. for example at All Saints' and at St Saviour's: East London Advertiser, 5.1.1924 and 12.2.1927.

66. THLHL, Poplar Chamber of Commerce, Handbook and Trade Directory of Members and Subscribers (Poplar, 1925), p.1; East London Advertiser, 19.6.1920.

67. THLHL, collection of parish magazines, passim.

churches;⁶⁸ local branches of larger organisations ranging from the Scouts to the League of Nations Union were based at churches in Bow and Poplar.⁶⁹

The integration of the churches into the structure of Poplar borough's civic life was symbolised in the way they shared the techniques used by many other Poplar organisations to bring themselves to the attention of the public. One example is the use of the procession: trade union processions, 'processions to raise money for charities, unemployed processions or demonstrations, processions and parades to support the peace movement or the suffragettes or the councillors in 1921 -- and Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic processions. The 1927 St Saviour's procession was important in the eyes of its organisers because of its 'tremendous power of witness and ... stirring force of unity'.⁷⁰ Its value was its 'power' and 'force' in taking the faith of the church into the streets and presenting it to people who never came to a service, and other strategies were used for the same end; open-air meetings, dock-gate sermons, visiting, social events, social services, all were methods used by the churches to integrate themselves into local civil society. And other Poplar organisations used the same techniques, as previous chapters have shown. Attendance at church thus bestowed some civic importance on congregation members, and status-conscious Poplar people may have gone to churches for that reason.

Another cause of churchgoing in Poplar was the ritual of church services. It was a commonplace among church workers that only if a church was 'High' would it attract any East Enders.⁷¹ The term High was usually applied to

68. THLHL, Poplar Freemason All Saints' Lodge, Order of Commemoration Service, All Saints' Church, October 2 1927 (Poplar, 1927); THLHL, Masonic Memorial Service, St Matthias's, May 1 1919 (Poplar, 1919).

69. THLHL, collection of parish magazines, passim.

70. THLHL, Poplar Rural Deanery, minutes of meetings, 8.3.1927.

71. East London Advertiser, 2.4.1921 and 14.3.1925; R. Kennedy-Cox, An Autobiography (London, 1931), p.106.

Anglican clergy who tended towards the elaborate ritual of the Roman Catholic church, although in Bow even the Wesleyan church was built in an elaborate neo-Gothic style and painted bright red in the mid-1920s to attract more people.⁷² The argument explaining this love of display usually ran that the lives of east London's slum dwellers were so drab, poor things, that they liked a bit of colour in their churches and were especially attracted to bright vestments, incense, sung Mass, candles and general ostentation.⁷³ It was true that East Enders liked decoration and colour; the prints hanging on living-room walls, mantlepieces full of knick-knacks, lovingly tended gardens and concern for stylish dressing are all testimony to that, and no doubt churches could appeal by making themselves beautiful places. Certainly John Groser attributed the increased congregations at St Michael and All Angels' in part to the institution of chanted liturgies, the hanging of exquisite woven tapestries in the church and displays of flowers.⁷⁴

Also guaranteed to draw crowds into Poplar churches and chapels were eloquent oratory, moving sermons and rousing hymns. A contemporary noted that unless preachers were good speakers, Poplar people would not bother with them.⁷⁵ Their enthusiasm for a good time and a knees-up has already been mentioned, and their love of singing; their enjoyment is summarised in this account of a community singing session in Poplar Town Hall:

The Hall was well filled with men and women who appeared to have no clear idea of what was to happen. But there is no room for self-consciousness in Poplar, and they settled down to sing with a will even before they were invited ... they sang with complete abandon until the rafters rang.⁷⁶

72. A.H. Bird, Outreach: The Story of One Hundred Years of Christian Witness in London's East End (Old Ford, 1970), p.12.

73. see the Bishop of London in the East London Advertiser, 14.3.1925.

74. J. Desormeaux, 'Poplar Days', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by K. Brill (London, 1971), pp.29-37 (p.30).

75. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.84.

A rousing preacher could pull in a congregation on the same principles. The Rev W. Simmons, for example, arrived at St Matthias in 1925 and immediately increased attendance on Sunday evenings there by one hundred and fifty people.⁷⁷

The attraction of individuals varied between denominations; Catholic priests had the strongest hold over their congregations. The awe and reverence in which they were held by their flock is conveyed in this description of a visit made by Fr Bernard Vaughan to an East End slum in 1907:

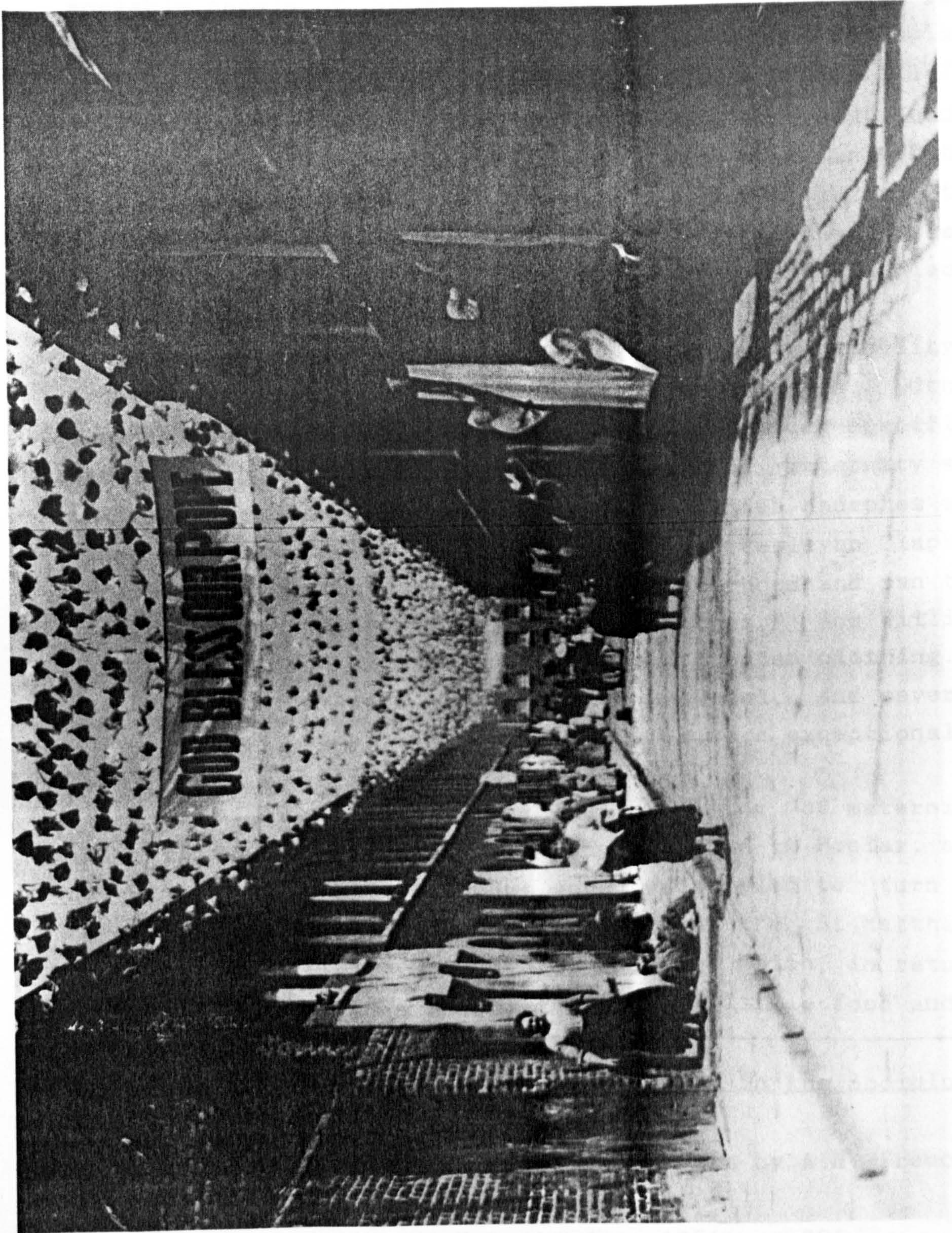
Heads were thrust out of windows alow and aloft, figures loomed at doorways and in staircases. Then a woman, with great bare arms, carried out her kitchen table, and placed it under the single lamp which hung on one of the walls. Tim removed the cloth from the Cross, and reared it up against the lamp, so that the light shone upon that poor agonised figure, so torn and bleeding. Tim ... asked me for the case. He opened it and handed the stole to the Father, who put it on, got onto the table, and after a few words of welcome called for a hymn, which was evidently well-known. It was a remarkable scene. There must have been three or four hundred people gathered together in the Court ... every eye was on the Cross and the preacher on his table under the lamp, with that stole glittering and shining upon his bosom.⁷⁸

The power of the Catholic priest does not seem to have diminished by the 1920s. The annual Catholic procession through the Irish streets of south Poplar was a major event and every house was decorated for its passing, no matter how poor. Downstairs windows were removed and shrines to the Virgin installed instead, bunting was strung from roof to roof and banners hung across the narrow streets. The Catholic church on the Isle of Dogs was always full on a Sunday, an Island resident remembers, as were the other Catholic places of worship in the borough.⁷⁹

77. East London Church Chronicle, 38 no.4 (1926), p.6.

78. C.C. Martindale, Bernard Vaughan, S.J. (London, 1923), p.132. Fr Vaughan was based at SS Mary and Michael on Commercial Road from 1902 until about 1911. See also R. Samuel, 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor', in The Irish in the Victorian City, edited by R. Swift and S. Gilley (London, 1985), pp.267-300.

79. interview with Mrs Garland; G. Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar (London, 1975), p.16.



Rook Street decorated for the 1920 Catholic procession

Source: Tower Hamlets Local History Library

02. Mr. Paul. *Anglo-Young Man's Club*, 1931, p. 221.

01. Interview by the author with Mr. Barker, and with Mr. Stoths, 13. 7. 1939.

As well as powerful individuals able to attract congregations through some special personal or religious appeal, social activities were crucial in attracting people into the churches. Debates, outings, socials, bazaars, clubs, films, guilds, all were used to draw in the sociable people of Poplar. The table on the following page summarises these activities in Anglican churches in Poplar, but all denominations organised similar events. The Wesleyans were especially active, and the East London Advertiser was full of their pursuits each week; indeed the historian of Methodism has noted that by the 1920s, 'the metamorphosis of religious act into entertainment seems almost complete' because of the increasing emphasis placed on the social life of the chapel.⁸⁰

These attractions -- ritual, oratory, sociability-- probably brought both men and women into churches. Other appeals made by the churches were more gender-specific. Particularly important to women were the maternity and child welfare and other social services which churches and chapels still offered in the 1920s. The Wesleyan Clapham offered layettes to the women of his Sisterhood and ran two jumble sales a week to provide cheap clothes,⁸¹ and William Dick at Trinity Congregational also distributed clothing.⁸² The Wesleyan Reverend Lax gave away coal, and several churches ran soup kitchens when times were exceptionally hard.⁸³

By the 1920s however municipal provision of maternity and child welfare services was comprehensive in Poplar, and relief was generous. No doubt women were glad to turn to these sources of help instead of to the St Matthias Clothing and Maternal Society for example, which, in return for the loan of linen and the gifts of a little food and a

80. R. Currie, Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism (London, 1968), p.138.

81. THLHL, interview with Rev W.E. Clapham by A.H. French, 17.12.1967, pp.2-3.

82. L. Paul, Angry Young Man (London, 1951), p.221.

83. interviews by the author with Mr Barker, and with Mr Stothard, 25.7.1986.

TABLE 10
ACTIVITIES AT ANGLICAN CHURCHES IN 1920s POPLAR

	church: A B C D E F G H I J									
Cubs	*	*	*		*					*
Scouts		*	*		*			*	*	*
Brownies		*	*		*		*			
Guides	*	*	*			*		*	*	*
Church Lad's Brigade			*		*		*	*		*
Church Cadet Brigade				*		*				
Drill Club						*				
Girls' Club	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	*
Lad's Club							*	*	*	*
Young People's Club			*		*					*
Band of Hope					*				*	
Brass Band	*		*				*			
Choir (other than church)						*	*		*	
Rambling Club			*		*					
Football teams		*		*	*					
other sports				*				*		
Clothing and Maternal Society			*							
Penny Bank or similar			*	*	*		*		*	*
Dressmaking classes			*	*	*					
Singing classes	*					*				
Drama Society	*	*	*						*	*
Elocution classes	*	*								
Missionary Study Circle	*									
Church of England Men's Society			*					*	*	
Men's meeting	*			*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Womens' meeting		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Mothers' Union	*	*	*					*		
Communicants' guilds	*	*	*	*	*	*		*		
Whist drives and socials	*			*			*	*		*

* indicates an activity pursued

Churches: A All Saints', Poplar
 B St Matthias's, Poplar
 C St Saviour's, Poplar
 D St Stephen's, Poplar
 E All Hallows', Bromley
 F All Hallows', East India Dock Road
 G St Michael and All Angels', Bromley
 H St Mary's, Bromley
 I St Mary's, Bow
 J St Stephen's, Bow

Source: THLHL, parish magazine collection

Bible to necessitous and pregnant women, required two references from respectable persons, imposed frequent home visits and refused to help unmarried mothers; applications to it began to decline at about the same time Labour was making its influence felt on Poplar Board of Guardians' relief policy, although this could be a simple coincidence.⁸⁴ With this decline in the 1920s in the material temptations to church attendance, perhaps more important in drawing women towards the church was the female friendship and solidarity it could offer them. For, quite apart from the large women's meetings already described, women were the majority of churchgoers, although by how much it is difficult to say. One indication of their numerical dominance in Anglican congregations is their representation on PCCs. Since men usually outnumber women on official bodies even when women are the majority of the body's constituent voters, it is likely that the numbers of women on PCCs underestimates the actual number of women involved in the church. In fact, on the average PCC in Poplar, women outnumbered men. Analysis of the sex composition of the nineteen Councils at nine churches for which data survives shows an average of twelve women and nine men on a PCC.⁸⁵ Evidence for women's dominance of nonconformist congregations is equally scanty, but the membership list of Harley Street Congregational Church in 1919 listed 118 members, whom more than three-quarters were women.⁸⁶ This made churches virtually women's organisations, at least in terms of membership, and

84. GLRO, St Matthias Church Clothing and Maternal Society Books, 1871-1921 and 1881-1925. The Society seems to have died in 1925.

85. The nine churches are All Hallows' Bromley, St Mary's Bow, St Mary's Bromley, St Michael and All Angels', St Saviour's, St Stephen's Bow, St Stephen's Poplar, St Matthias and All Hallows' East India Dock Road. The composition of their Parochial Church Councils is recorded for all but All Hallows' Bromley in their parish magazines in *THLHL*, *passim*; that of All Hallows' Bromley is in the minutes of its Council's meetings: GLRO, All Hallows' Bromley, Parochial Church Council, minutes of meetings, *passim*.

86. Harley Street Congregational Church, membership list, 1919?.

given the sociability of the neighbourhoods which pivoted around women and their survival networks, churches were centres of female conviviality.

The dominance of women made churches women's spaces. The centrality of East End women to the survival of their family made them formidable figures: supportive and resilient, full of strength and resourcefulness in coping with their harsh lives, with a sharp and raucous sense of humour, 'the main saviour of the household'.⁸⁷ As one observer put it, 'very often there is more character in a woman's little finger than in her husband's whole body',⁸⁸ and working-class autobiographies are always full of praise for mother. These strong women brought their own concerns, understandings and moods to the churches and created the atmosphere of their gatherings, just as they did at the settlements' women's meetings described in chapter III. The Bishop of Southwark admitted as much in a guide to parochial work written in 1933; priests must be careful to visit homes in order to talk to men, he said, or they would lose the knack of masculine conversation,⁸⁹ the implication being that the concerns and even the language of women pervaded the church.

If their sociability as women's spaces attracted women to the church, it had just the opposite effect on men. In the East End, 'real men' did not go to church. In 1894 the Bishop of London had written that east Londoners 'associate religion with weakness and think that Christianity is fit only for women and children',⁹⁰ and in the 1920s being religious was still seen as something alien to working-class masculinity. The strongest branch of the Church of England's Men's Society in east London was at St Mary's in

87. Blake, Memories of Old Poplar, p.8.

88. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.188.

89. A.L. Preston, The Parish Priest in His Parish (London, 1933), p.9.

90. Quoted in Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England, p.33.

Bow, and even that had only thirty members.⁹¹ Not only were most churches ignored by men because church attendance was seen as a female activity, but the central features of East End masculinity were all rejected by the churches, as will now be shown. This sketch of the masculinity of Poplar men will be brief but is not necessarily a caricature for that; Shapiro has argued that masculinism becomes especially stark and brutal when it develops in all-male workplaces,⁹² and the majority of Poplar men did indeed work in wholly male locations: docks, engineering workshops, railways. Their male bravado precluded anything as effeminate as going to church.

East End masculinity, then, involved physical strength and skill. This was true not only in the workplace but also in other arenas of life; boxing was a very popular hobby and a woman who lived in Grove Villas, Poplar, in the 1920s remembered that when her brothers expressed an interest in boxing, 'my father was very pleased that he had sired men boys, but mother was most disapproving, for she thought boxing a coarse and cruel sport ... father dismissed mother's disapproval as a weak and feminine attitude'.⁹³ Priests would find it difficult to demonstrate their own physical prowess, although they took care to stress that of missionaries and of Christ and his disciples. Here is the vicar of All Hallows' in East India Dock Road in 1924 writing a letter purporting to be from one working man to another, discussing a visit to a missionary exhibition:

There was a crowd of parsons at the Exhibition and, as you say, the one from China was a man doing a man's job. I wonder why men usually reckon Christianity is only a thing for the old woman and the kids; it ain't only for them, it's for the MEN as well. Who were the first Christians? Men, with red blood in their veins -- Shepherds,

91. St Mary's Bow, Parish Magazine, August and November 1920, unpaginated.

92. D. Shapiro, 'Explaining Peripheral Change', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group, (London, 1985), pp.77-95 (p.90).

93. D. Scannell, Mother Knew Best: An East End Childhood (London, 1974), p.93.

Fishermen and such like. The Master himself, as you know, was a Carpenter. Why should it be a namby-pamby business?⁹⁴

Neither did most priests drink in the way men were expected to. Pubs were an important focus of male sociability; working-men's clubs existed for the purpose of drinking and trade union branches often met in pubs. A church with a strong commitment to temperance, as most had in the 1920s, was not going to win mass support among the men of Poplar. Gambling was another popular male past-time to which the churches were opposed, and the aggressive male sexuality of East End men was also an anathema to clergy. Some of the slang used by dockers shows just how macho they were; a cargo which fell open and scattered as it was being loaded from ship to shore was called a 'greenacre', perpetuating (and even celebrating?) a man by the name of Greenacre who murdered his unfaithful wife by chopping her into small pieces and hiding each one separately.⁹⁵ In contrast, the 1933 handbook of parochial activity was worried enough about the reputation of clergy to insist to its clerical audience that 'orders do not destroy our manhood, and we are men all the time, and ought to have a man's interests, a man's recreations, and to express ourselves with a man's vocabulary'.⁹⁶ To East End men neither the priests nor the congregations of churches appeared adequately masculine.

In the face of their alienation from most men in Poplar, the churches made determined attempts to convert them and used gender-specific techniques to do so. They offered material benefits for regular attendance at men's meetings. The Wesleyan Clapham, for example, unlike the Superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission in Poplar, was concerned with social issues and at his chapel ran a centre for unemployed men where they could buy cheap haircuts and

94. All Hallows' East India Dock Road, Parish Magazine, August 1924, unpaginated.

95. interview with Mr Dash by the author, 3.2.1986.

96. Preston, The Parish Priest in His Parish, p.130.

meals and use equipment for mending their boots for free;⁹⁷ these benefits attracted the less scrupulous among Clapham's neighbours for one man refused to come to the centre because, as he said, 'I was a bit pertickler abaht my company'.⁹⁸ Another male-oriented church activity was sport. Many Poplar churches and chapels ran football and cricket teams, as table 10 showed. In his Dockland Settlement Kennedy-Cox brought famous athletes to Poplar to explain why they did not touch the demon drink, such figures of physical prowess being very influential among men and boys, he thought.⁹⁹ Another attempt to assert the masculinity of the church and thus to tempt men into it was the general air of aggression, verging into belligerence and even violence, which pervaded church activities designated as male; the Wesleyan Clapham saw 'virility' as the key to a successful appeal to men,¹⁰⁰ a significant term connoting physical strength and also aggressive male sexuality. Thus the language and ritual used for men was different from that of ordinary services; men were thought to prefer short, sharp, straightforward services with no nonsense about it,¹⁰¹ and Eileen Baillie's father always played hymns with martial-sounding music at his services for men at St Michael and All Angels before the Great War.¹⁰² For young boys there were the Scouts and Brigades, with their militarist overtones. The churches thus attempted to appeal to men by organising masculine activities.

97. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, pp.37-38. His difference with his Superintendent is mentioned obliquely on page 112.

98. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.53.

99. Kennedy-Cox, An Autobiography, p.228.

100. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.34.

101. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.35; T. Garland, Snapshots of My Life's Work (London, 1910), p.44; R. Kennedy-Cox, Through the Dock Gates (London, 1939), p.230.

102. E. Baillie, The Shabby Paradise: The Autobiography of a Decade (London, 1958), p.79.

Yet, although most of Poplar's churches ran sports teams and men's meetings, only three clergy appear to have been successful in winning men's loyalty: John Groser at St Michael's, Clapham at Bow Wesleyan Mission and William Dick at Trinity Congregational.¹⁰³ Why did these three in particular manage to overcome the effeminate reputation of churchgoing in Poplar? It was true that John Groser often went for a drink at his local,¹⁰⁴ and thus proved that he at least was a man, but neither Dick nor Clapham drank. The common denominator among these three was their political commitment. It was their explicit politics which brought men into these three churches. Politics were a male sphere in the 1920s, both nationally and locally; despite the intensity of the suffrage struggle in Poplar, the belief of even so active a woman as Nellie Cressall that women's place was in the home was described in chapter II. Politics was part of the masculine world of public affairs, government and power. Its overt presence in the church counteracted the effeminacy of religion and did more than anything else to attract men to church and chapel.

There were many reasons to attend church in Poplar then, each with a differing degree of pull to men and to women: status, various social services, conviviality, entertainment, politics. The examination of these has clarified the nature of the churches in Poplar. It has also offered a clue to the religiosity of Poplar Labour Party, for the politics to be found in Poplar pulpits were left-wing; Groser, Dick and Clapham were Christian Socialists. The next section explores the intersection between socialism and religion in the borough in more detail.

103. Dick and Clapham ran men's meetings each of which had over two hundred members, and St Michael and All Angels had an unusually large majority of men sitting on its Parochial Church Council: Dick diary, *passim*; Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow, p.36; St Michael and All Angels Bromley, Parish Magazine, March 1921 and March 1922, unpaginated.

104. interview with Mr Barker.

Religion and socialism in 1920s Poplar

Explicit politics in a church in the 1920s were almost always socialist. Although the previous section argued that politics were of relatively greater importance in attracting men to church than women, socialist priests increased the appeal of Poplar churches to women, for women too were staunch Labour supporters who would prefer a minister who shared their views and opinions. Christian Socialism must therefore be added to the reasons offered in the previous section for Poplar people's unusual degree of church attendance. This section begins by exploring the sort of socialism espoused by local radical clergy and its success in winning large congregations in Poplar, and then discusses the relationship between Christian Socialism and Poplar Labour Party.

Socialist clergy in Poplar

Many clergy were radicalised by the desperate poverty of Poplar. The Rev Cotter of All Saints wrote to The Times in 1921 to justify Poplarism in terms of his own experience of the locality. After remarking that the sheer poverty of Poplar could not be imagined by those who had never seen the place, he went on:

Please don't think too badly of us in Poplar. The men are of the very best, ready to help one another in a way that often makes one ashamed of one's own selfishness; only they do want to work.¹⁰⁵

John Groser said:

It was not till I went to Poplar that this political business, in which I was before interested in a detached and theoretical way, became personal and real. Lives were at stake. Persons were the issue.¹⁰⁶

But Groser had seen poverty as extreme as Poplar's in his previous curacy at Newcastle-on-Tyne and had not become a full-blown socialist there, so it would be more accurate to say that it was not poverty per se which radicalised him

105. THLHL, album of press cuttings on Poplarism, letter to the Times written by Rev C.R. Cotter on 7.9.1921.

106. Groser, Politics and Persons, p.14.

but his association in Poplar with Poplar Labour Party; George Lansbury became a very close friend and no doubt politicised Groser.¹⁰⁷ The existence of Poplar Labour Party probably radicalised other clergymen too, and this may account for the unusual numbers of left-wing clergy in Poplar who are described below. But priests like Groser and Cotter could make both political and religious sense of poverty because of the existence of the Christian Socialist movement which united Christian theology with left-wing politics. It was this Christian Socialism, described previously, which was preached in many Poplar churches.

Several of the most important of the early Christian Socialists had been active in Poplar, and Jones has traced the proliferation of guilds and leagues and fellowships which flourished and then died in the years before 1914.¹⁰⁸ After the First World War, it appears that four major groups remained: the League of the Kingdom of God, the Society of Socialist Christians, the Catholic Crusade and the Industrial Christian Fellowship.¹⁰⁹ The latter two were represented in Poplar. There was a branch of the Industrial Christian Fellowship in Bow and in 1921 Poplar Rural Deanery recommended membership of the Fellowship to all its clergy;¹¹⁰ and John Groser and Jack Bucknall, curates at St Michael and All Angels, were members of the Catholic Crusade.¹¹¹ A chapter of a minor Christian Socialist grouping met in Poplar too: the Brethren of the Common Table. This was apparently based on the economics of the communion table, and its members met monthly in Kingsley Hall to confess how much money they had spent on themselves and to give any surplus to the more needy members of the group.¹¹²

107. Groser, Politics and Persons, p.25.

108. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival.

109. Binyon, The Christian Socialist Movement in England; Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival.

110. Grant, Earthing Bundles, p.130; Poplar Rural Deanery meeting minutes, 21.5.1921.

111. C. Noel, An Autobiography (London, 1945), p.107.

112. M. Lester, It Occurred to Me (London, 1937), pp.90-91.

The most famous of Poplar's radical priests was John Groser, and his ideas will now be examined to give an idea of what Christian Socialism meant in the locality. Groser's theology was quite orthodox;¹¹³ he believed that sinful humankind, as inherently social creatures, had built the evil society that was capitalism, and all Christians therefore had a duty to fight and replace it with God's kingdom on earth. 'If Jesus were to save His people from their sins,' wrote Groser, 'He must challenge sin not merely as it showed itself in individuals, but in the sort of life and organisation which sinful man had built'.¹¹⁴ He also believed in the importance of High ritual. This led him to institute the practices at St Michael's which have already been mentioned as one cause of his success in attracting congregations there -- sung mass, beautiful decoration -- and in the same spirit of celebrating God's presence in the world he encouraged his acolytes to wear bright clothes; women under his influence could be spotted by their colourful headscarves.¹¹⁵ Subversive hymns were sung in his services, this one to the tune of 'We Plough the Fields and Scatter':¹¹⁶

God is the only landlord
To whom all rents are due,
He made the earth for all men
And not for just a few.
The four parts of creation,
Earth, Water, Air and Fire,
God made and blessed and stationed
For every man's desire ...

More unusual than these church practices was Groser's refusal to separate his theological beliefs from his actions; they naturally led him to left-wing political activism. He allowed Sylvia Pankhurst's WSF to meet in St

113. D. Platt, 'Socialist Because Christian', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by Brill, pp.160-92.

114. Groser, Politics and Persons, p.88.

115. Desormeaux, 'Poplar Days', p.32. Muriel Lester at Kingsley Hall always wore a bright cloak for the same reasons: L. Valentine, Two Sisters and the Cockney Kids (London, 1978), section V, unpaginated.

116. K. Brill, 'Parish Priest', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by Brill, pp.74-96 (p.79).

Michael's church hall,¹¹⁷ and, once radicalised by Poplar's poverty and by the passion of its Labour Party's politics, he began to take his brand of Christian Socialism out of the church and into the streets of Poplar. He preached on a portable platform decorated with a crucifix for Christ, a red flag for socialism and a St George's flag for anti-imperialism and related the Bible to the lives of local people.¹¹⁸ He was involved in Irish politics and was active in several local strikes; at the end of the General Strike he was speaking to the crowds waiting for news of the Strike's end and was injured in a violent police baton-charge after his attempted placation of the police failed.¹¹⁹ This radicalism helped Groser to run a popular church and a successful men's meeting.¹²⁰

There were also nonconformist radicals in Poplar. William Dick at Trinity Congregational Church for example was 'an emotional and eloquent preacher, full of anger at the unemployment which scourged his congregation'.¹²¹ He arrived in Poplar in 1924 and began to keep a daily diary of his activities. They included inviting the Christian Socialist Fr Adderley to address his men's meeting, allowing Labour Party ward committee meetings to use the minor hall at Trinity, marching on an unemployed demonstration and talking to meetings of the unemployed in the Town Hall, allowing the use of his church for a No More War demonstration by the unemployed, speaking to the PWLG, letting seamen use the church hall for strike meetings in 1925, and chairing a public debate between a Socialist and a Conservative on the cure for unemployment.¹²² He often spoke to his men's meeting on Socialism and in 1926 a Communist came to speak; the growth in members of his

117. Workers' Dreadnought, 26.6.1920.

118. Desormeaux, 'Poplar Days', p.30.

119. Desormeaux, 'Poplar Days', pp.33-34.

120. St Michael and All Angels', Parish Magazine, passim.

121. Paul, Angry Young Man, p.220.

122. Dick diary, 1.1.1925, 20.1.1925, 23.2.1925, 28.4.1925, 21.4.1925, 28.5.1925, 1.9.1925 and 12.4.1926.

church was noted earlier and by December 1924 his men's meeting had 230 members.¹²³ One of his favourite sermons was 'The Social Principles of Christ'.¹²⁴

It is tempting to argue from the cases of Groser, Clapham and Dick that it was the political radicalism of the clergy which determined the popularity of a church in Poplar. There were many radical preachers locally. Simeon Cole, for example, was very successful at the Old Ford and Millwall branches of the Wesleyan Mission, drawing large congregations and giving talks to Wesleyan Guilds on Keir Hardie, Bernard Shaw and Bolshevism; in 1929 he debated the motion 'Is Labour Fit to Govern?', taking the affirmative and carrying the vote.¹²⁵ He also invited a miners' choir to come and sing for funds during the 1926 coal strike.¹²⁶ He was present with Mary Collins of the North Bow Congregational Church at a meeting of the unemployed at Bromley called to demand an end to British intervention in China and the reform of the Poor Law;¹²⁷ Collins too ran a popular church the membership of which grew steadily after her arrival in 1924.¹²⁸ Harry Williams was pastor of Bruce Road Congregational Church; attendance there increased dramatically after his arrival in 1926, and in 1928 he was elected a Labour Guardian.¹²⁹ And of course there was Muriel Lester, whose popularity, political activism and religious beliefs have already been mentioned in previous chapters as well as this one. The continued importance of

123. Dick diary, 12.3.1925, 20.5.1926, 9.9.1926 and 4.12.1924. The Communist was Jack Snook, who stood as a Communist Party candidate in the 1928 council elections in Poplar: East London Advertiser, 20.10.1928.

124. Dick diary, passim. See also in THLHL, typescript by E.H.R. Rozzell, A Concise History of Trinity Worship and Work, (n.d.).

125. East London Advertiser, 25.2.1928, 21.4.1928, 26.1.1929 and 20.20.1928.

126. Bird, Outreach, p.12.

127. East London Advertiser, 12.2.1927.

128. Congregational Yearbook, 1924-29.

129. East London Advertiser, 2.11.1929 and 7.4.1928.

churchgoing in Poplar when it was a habit in decline elsewhere can be explained by the many left-wing clergy to be found in the borough and their appeal to a politically conscious population.

Christian Socialism and Poplar Labour Party

If Christian Socialism was responsible for the relative popularity of organised religion in Poplar, it also had marked effects on the politics of Poplar Labour Party. This was because many Party activists also went regularly to church and were inspired by the religious arguments for socialism they heard there.

Poplar Labour Party was full of believers. William Sell, a long-term Labour councillor and Guardian, was a churchwarden at St Michael and All Angels' and in January 1926 was a speaker at a Christian Socialist meeting held there; along with Labour councillors Guy, Tanner, Jerwood and Palfreman he helped to organise a fete at St Michael's in the summer of 1926 to help raise money for the families of the locked-out miners.¹³⁰ In 1925, Henry Sloman was a Labour councillor, secretary of the stevedores' union and coach of St Saviour's church band.¹³¹ Sam March and Charlie Key were at the opening of a temperance pub at Berger Baptist Hall in 1924.¹³² The Labour Guardian Helen Mackay worked at the Women's Presbyterian Settlement.¹³³ Alfred Partridge was another Labour stalwart who was very active in Poplar Congregationalism and in April 1926 councillors Hammond and Blacketer were invited by Bruce Road Congregational Church to take part in the Sunday

130. St Michael and All Angels, Parish Magazine, May 1925, unpaginated; Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 30.1.1926; THLHL, St Michael and All Angels Charity Entertainments Committee, Programme of a Grand Garden Fete in Aid of the Miners' Wives and Children Fund, July 21st and 22nd 1926 (Poplar, 1926).

131. St Saviour's, Parish Magazine, April 1925, unpaginated.

132. East London Advertiser, 27.9.1924.

133. THLHL, Women's Presbyterian Settlement, Annual Report 1929, (Poplar, 1930), p.8.

service.¹³⁴ Chapter III mentioned the involvement of Bill Sell and Tom Goodway in Kingsley Hall. John Hegarty, Pete Hubbart and John and Julia Scurr were Catholics, and it was John Scurr who was responsible for the prayer at the entrance of Poplar Town Hall with which this chapter began.¹³⁵

The most prominent and articulate Christian Socialist in Poplar Labour Party was George Lansbury, who regularly attended St Stephen's in Bow. He helped to found the Bow branch of the Church Socialist League before the First World War and he was never reticent about his faith.¹³⁶ 'Socialism has for years meant for me the finest, fullest expression of everything learned from religion', he wrote,¹³⁷ and he explained this claim in two studies, a 1924 ILP pamphlet and a longer book published in 1920. His beliefs will now be described as an example of the connections made between politics and religion by Poplar's Christian politicians.

Lansbury's pamphlet discussed the relevance of Christ's life today.¹³⁸ Jesus, Lansbury argued, broke down the barriers between rich and poor and Jew and Gentile by preaching brotherhood and loving everyone, and belief in him now was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, his message opposed the competitiveness, selfishness and greed which were the central elements of capitalism, and the Christian gospel thus provided a comprehensive critique of capitalism and a constant moral benchmark by which to measure the progress of the class war. (This idea that

134. N. Branson, Poplarism 1919-25: George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt (London, 1979), p.236; East London Advertiser, 24.4.1926.

135. Hegarty and Hubbart are listed as managers of local Roman Catholic schools in the East London Advertiser, 17.1.1920. Hubbart and Scurr are mentioned as present at a Catholic rally at Premierland in Stepney in the East London Advertiser, 16.1.1926. The prayer is attributed to Scurr in the Record, January 1923, p.6.

136. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury My Father, (London, 1934), p.120.

137. G. Lansbury, My Life (London, 1928), p.8.

138. G. Lansbury, Jesus and Labour (London, 1924).

life under capitalism necessarily involved behaviour antithetical to Christian belief was a common one among Christian Labour thinkers of the time).¹³⁹ Secondly, Lansbury argued that to engage in the class struggle required great spiritual strength and fortitude which only Christianity could supply and belief was therefore necessary to sustain struggle. This was perhaps Lansbury's personal experience, for his son said that 'there is no doubt whatever that father found help, comfort and guidance from regular attendance at Bow Church'.¹⁴⁰ Lansbury's book, These Things Shall Be, was an exploration of the importance of brotherhood and love. It stressed the idea that 'we must reconcile and redeem the world by the power of a great overwhelming love, and this comes and can only come from God';¹⁴¹ socialists were for him simply 'people who are full of the spirit of brotherhood and love' (p.10). Although beyond this faith in God's love his theology was somewhat vague,¹⁴² Lansbury was convinced that Christian values were inherently opposed to capitalism and that socialism embodied an alternative ethic for living.

The next section explores the effect of this religiosity on the policies of Poplar Labour Party.

The Christian influence on Poplar Labour Party

The impact of religion on socialist politics is often mentioned by historians of the British labour movement. Frequently this is no more than a passing mention of the ascetic nonconformism of the ILP,¹⁴³ or a list of labour

139. for two other examples, see G. Benson, Socialism and the Teaching of Jesus (London, 1925) and J.K. Hardie, Can a Man Be a Christian on a Pound a Week?, third edition (London, 1905).

140. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father, p.117.

141. G. Lansbury, These Things Shall Be (London, 1920), p.79.

142. R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London, 1951), p.58.

143. see for example Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, pp.95-6.

activists who were believers;¹⁴⁴ the specific effects of this Christianity are never specified. In Poplar, the Christian influence on the local Labour Party's politics is clear. It had three aspects.

The first was Poplar Labour Party's pacifism. Several of the Party's most prominent individuals were pacifists: George Cressall, the secretary of South Poplar Labour Party, and his wife Nellie, George and Edgar Lansbury and John Scurr.¹⁴⁵ George Lansbury resigned the leadership of the Labour Party in 1936 because of his pacifism,¹⁴⁶ and given the involvement of Labour councillors Bill Sell and Tom Goodway in Kingsley Hall it seems probable that they shared the same commitment to peace. Pacifism was a complex movement in the 1920s, its participants holding many different motivations, and it has already been discussed in the context of socialist, feminist and radical citizenship ideas in chapters II and III.¹⁴⁷ Here its religious impulse will be examined.

To radical Christians who believed in putting Christ's words into practice, all violence was an abomination because it defied the requirement to love thy neighbour. One Christian pacifist organisation which argued that 'love, as revealed and interpreted in the life and death of Jesus Christ ... is the only power by which evil can be overcome ... [and] therefore, as Christians, we are

144. R.F. Wearmouth, The Political and Social Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century (London, 1957).

145. J.M. Bellamy and J. Saville, Dictionary of Labour Biography, vol 4 (London, 1977), p.154; interview with Mrs Cressall by Prof. W. Fishman, 1965.

146. for contrasting accounts of his resignation, see Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, pp.303-04 and A. Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Volume One. Trade Union Leader 1881-1940 (London, 1960), pp.564-71.

147. for a discussion of inter-war pacifism, see M. Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain 1914-45: The Defining of a Faith (Oxford, 1980). Ceadel ignores contribution of the women's movement however; see A. Wiltsher, Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners in the First World War (London, 1985).

forbidden to wage war',¹⁴⁸ was the Fellowship of Reconciliation with which Muriel Lester, her sister Doris, George Lansbury and his daughter Annie were deeply involved.¹⁴⁹ The Fellowship began as a pacifist group just after the outbreak of war in 1914 and it advocated 'a way of making peace by creating personal understanding, disarming the opponent by love'.¹⁵⁰ As Lansbury said more prosaically, 'it is quite clear that what the world needs is more love and less hate',¹⁵¹ and this was his reason for rejecting Communism; much as he desired the overthrow of capitalism, he could not condone bloodshed as a means to that end.¹⁵² Muriel Lester too was convinced that 'love, as manifested in the teaching, life and death of Jesus Christ, is the only sure foundation for the peace and well-being of the world'.¹⁵³ Love for all involved 'the breaking down of racial, class and national barriers' and it was the basis of Kingsley Hall's politics.¹⁵⁴ Speakers there tackled themes such as 'The Application of Christian Principles to Ireland', and Muriel herself publicised the pacifist politics of Gandhi.¹⁵⁵

148. This is a quotation from 'The Basis' of the Fellowship, the document of common aims drawn up at its founding meeting; quoted in V. Brittain, The Rebel Passion: A Short History of Some Pioneer Peace-Makers (London, 1964), p.35.

149. British Library of Political and Economic Science, Fellowship of Reconciliation archive, General Committee minutes of meetings, 20-21.12.1920 and 21-22.1.1918; G. Lansbury, Why I Joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (London, n.d.). For a fuller account of the Fellowship, see Brittain, The Rebel Passion.

150. The Fellowship of Reconciliation, The Fellowship of Reconciliation, (London, 1926), p.1.

151. Lansbury, Why I Joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, p.2.

152. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, p.242.

153. M. Lester, Kill or Cure? (Nashville, 1937), p.34.

154. Lester, Kill or Cure?, p.48.

155. THLHL, correspondence from Muriel Lester to the Borough Librarian.

Less radical Christian pacifist groups also flourished in the post-war years, often involved in the more modest task of working for international peace and co-operation. Their ideals were more widely accepted in Poplar than the 'complete disarmament of body and mind' desired by the Fellowship of Reconciliation.¹⁵⁶ Poplar and Stepney nonconformist churches often met in the 1920s to pass anti-war resolutions and to urge the government to reduce its armaments, for example.¹⁵⁷ When the local branch of the League of Nations Union was established in Poplar, five of its eight committee members were either ministers or ran religious settlements, and Poplar Rural Deanery recommended Poplar clergy to support the League.¹⁵⁸ More moderate than the absolute pacifism of the Fellowship, this religious will for international harmony must have encouraged the less radically Christian members of Poplar Labour Party to become involved in anti-war efforts during the 1920s: for example the Hands Off Russia movement discussed in Chapter II. Clearer evidence of the Party's religious ethic in such pacifist campaigns comes from a meeting it held in 1922 to protest at British intervention in the Turkish war where hung a banner proclaiming THOU SHALT NOT KILL.¹⁵⁹ Sam March, South Poplar's Labour M.P., was the president of the Poplar branch of the League of Nations Union.¹⁶⁰ Pacifism, either absolute or in the less radical form of internationalism, was the first way in which radical Christianity in Poplar affected Poplar Labour Party, then.

The second way in which its religiosity shaped the politics of Poplar Labour Party was through its Christian belief in the equal worth of every individual. Groser explained this by saying that all people were the children

156. Lester, Kill or Cure?, p.68.

157. East London Advertiser, 23.4.1927 and 5.11.1927.

158. East London Advertiser, 24.7.1921; Poplar Rural Deanery minutes, 21.5.1921.

159. East London Advertiser, 30.9.1922.

160. East London Advertiser, 24.7.1921.

of God and therefore all were equally valuable and deserved to be treated well.¹⁶¹ This respect for individuals' rights reinforced the Party's commitment to democracy which has been described already in terms of socialist ideology and of the idea of citizenship, and it fed the fires of Poplar Labour Party's hatred of the Poor Law system. George Lansbury abhorred the Poor Law most for the way it ignored the individual's fundamental human right to decent treatment and broke the spirit of the people who passed through its soul-destroying system;¹⁶² 'everything was done to inflict mental and moral degradation', he remarked, appalled, after his first visit to a work-house.¹⁶³ The Party's keenly-felt sense of the sheer cruelty of the Poor Law, based on the Christian conviction of human dignity, must have contributed to its decision in 1921 to defy the law in order to humanise the giving of relief to all those in need. And if the Poor Law was rejected for its crushing of the individual human spirit, the importance of socialism was that a socialist society would enable people to develop their spiritual potential, thought Lansbury.¹⁶⁴ Socialism was about liberating the individual spirit.

Socialism, in its structure and organisation, is the economic parallel of Christ's spiritual teaching ... Extreme poverty, which brutalises and degrades, and extreme wealth, which corrupts, will pass, and a new and nobler generation, purified and freed, will advance till man becomes but little lower than the angels.¹⁶⁵

This glorious and inspiring vision maintained the Party's motivation to better services and better relief levels as a

161. J. Groser, Does Socialism Need Religion? (London, 1951), p.11.

162. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, p.79. And see G. Lansbury, The Development of the Humane Administration of the Poor Law under the Poplar Board of Guardians (Woolwich, 1907).

163. Lansbury, My Life, p.136.

164. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father, p.15.

165. Benson, Socialism and the Teaching of Jesus, p.8. Benson was the treasurer of the ILP, an organisation with which many Poplar Labour activists were associated, as Chapter II noted.

means of achieving the perfect society of God's kingdom on earth.

The third and final way in which the Christianity of Poplar Labour Party influenced its politics was the absolute certainty it gave that socialism was morally correct. To be motivated by a religious ethic was to fight for the ultimate and indubitable goal, for Christianity was 'a good beyond society and beyond history'.¹⁶⁶ Christian faith was seen as an infallible guide to behaviour and action; it was the fount of 'those values which indeed have been made conscious to us and deepened in meaning through the Christian Gospel, [and] which are true whether we accept them or not'.¹⁶⁷ Poplar's Christian Socialists placed God's laws above any others; when her father left her a moderate fortune in 1927 Muriel Lester refused to accept most of it, arguing that 'though this money is mine according to the law of the land I believe that it is not mine in the sight of God.' And following the logic of the Brethren of the Common Table, she continued, 'I have no right to more than I need so long as any other human beings have less', and almost all of the money went to her trust fund described in Chapter III.¹⁶⁸ The same belief in a higher law enabled the defiance of Guilty and Proud of It to flow proud and uncowed in the absolute certainty that what Poplar Labour Party had done was sanctioned in the eyes of God. Hence the significance of the quotation from the Bible at its opening; if the Supreme Being was on your side, who cared what the Ministry of Health or the PBMA thought? It was this faith in their own convictions which was the cause of Poplarism, and Poplar's unique degree of religiosity was the reason why Poplar's Labour Party and nowhere else's went to prison. The councillors in 1921 were engaged in a spiritual crusade as much as a socialist one.

The religiosity of Poplar Labour Party stemmed both from the communal sensibility of a hazy belief in

166. Groser, Does Socialism Need Religion?, p.13.

167. Groser, Does Socialism Need Religion?, p.10.

168. East London Advertiser, 29.10.1927.

Christian morality among Poplar's neighbourhoods, and from the arguments of Christian Socialists concerning the social message of Christ's teaching. Those latter arguments had specific effects on the Party's politics, and in particular gave it a faith in its own convictions which stoked the Party's radicalism to such a degree that it was prepared to be martyred in gaol in 1921 in defence of its politico-religious heresy.

Not all of Poplar's churches were socialist however, and nor were all Poplar's socialists believers. The next sections examine the churches and politicians who stood outside the Church Socialist milieu.

The rejection of religion by the left Poplar

One of the themes of this thesis has been the complexity of Poplar's culture in relation to its politics. As the discussions of pacifism and of Poplar Labour Party's belief in the rights of the individual have intimated, political beliefs grew from a variety of influences. Further, not all of Poplar's communal sensibilities relate unproblematically to its local Labour Party's left-wing politics, and this is certainly true in the case of religion. To some Labour Party members, churches were an irrelevance, and some clergy felt the same way about the politics of Poplar Labour Party. This section explores the disjuncture between religion and socialists in Poplar.

Some of Poplar's left-wing politicians rejected religious belief itself. Edgar Lansbury, for example, preferred to understand his father's faith in secular terms; 'I think the terms "meditation" and "self-examination" might fitly describe what father calls "prayer"', he wrote.¹⁶⁹

A more common reason for socialists to reject religion and the churches was their conviction that the churches were but bourgeois institutions and thus could never really help the workers. Many socialists believed that the middle-classes used religion and the Bible for their own

169. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father, p.7.

ends and thus that the churches were class institutions, and this critique of the class-based nature of organised religion was strongly felt in Poplar. Both George Lansbury and Will Crooks argued its merits forcefully,¹⁷⁰ and Lansbury went through two spiritual crises, one at the turn of the century and again some time in the 1920s, when he felt that the Church of England was a hopeless case, a reactionary bulwark of the Establishment, which cared little for the poor and even less about how to prevent their poverty. He temporarily stopped taking communion and on the last occasion was only persuaded to return to the church by John Groser convincing him that the sacraments were not corrupted by the quality of the clergy administering them.¹⁷¹

Others of Poplar's Labour activists shared the same sentiments. Labour councillor Bert Easteal, for example, resented the 'middle-class do-gooders' of the churches and sent his children to the Socialist Sunday School associated with the WSF in Bromley.¹⁷² Socialist Sunday Schools aimed to teach children morality without religion, and the declaration made by kids at the Schools was that they 'desire to be just and loving to our fellow men and women, to work together as brothers and sisters, to be kind to every living creature, and so help form a new society with justice as its foundation and love for all'; their ten commandments included 'help to bring about the day when all nations will live fraternally', 'remember that all the products of the earth are the result of labour', and 'defend your rights and resist tyranny'.¹⁷³

The argument that the churches were bourgeois institutions was valid in Poplar. Although, as has been discussed, the influence of working-class women on the

170. G. Lansbury, pp.163-80, and W. Crooks, pp.74-83, in Christianity and the Working Classes edited by G. Haw (London, 1906).

171. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury My Father, p.91; Groser, Politics and Persons, p.25.

172. Workers' Dreadnought, 4.8.1917; interview with Mrs Sumner by the author, 2.6.1987.

173. East London Advertiser, 14.2.1925.

sociability of the churches was extensive and many priests were themselves shaped by Poplar and its loves and hates, the fact that most clergy were middle-class did create a gulf between them and their flock which could only be bridged by exceptional individuals. This gulf is most apparent in the memoirs written by East End churchworkers, in all of which there is an underlying belief in the enormous difference between the authors and East Enders. In these accounts, Poplar people spoke oddly, dressed distinctively, behaved unusually, and the fact that by and large they did not go to church was just one more difference among many, if an especially pertinent one to these writers. There was a vast gap between the bourgeois clergy and the working class of Poplar, a gap which the memoirs sense. Muriel Lester recalled in later years that before her first visit to Bow, 'I had never come into contact with working people except as they served me -- bus conductors, porters, cooks, gardeners',¹⁷⁴ and she was typical; the churches were run by bourgeois men and women in 1920s Poplar, and the argument of men like Crooks and Lansbury that churches were class institutions applied there as much as anywhere.

This social gulf was partly the result of a deliberate strategy by the Church of England, which still believed that 'the only way to deal with the East End was to send down an increasing band of unselfish men and women';¹⁷⁵ 'send down' meant missionaries from outside the area and its people, for, in the eyes of the church, in Poplar it was 'the people who are the real problem of the Church'.¹⁷⁶ In putting the blame for its lack of success on local people, the Anglican church clearly saw no difficulty in the fact that its ministers were all highly educated sons of the bourgeoisie who usually felt themselves worlds apart from their parishioners. The daughter of the minister of

174. THLHL, interview with M. Lester by A.H. French, 17.1.1968.

175. The Bishop of London in the East London Advertiser, 17.3.1923.

176. East London Church Chronicle, 42 no.1 (1930), p.5.

St Michael and All Angels just before the Great War remembers that she was not allowed to play with local children:

We, it seemed, were in comparative control of our own destinies and far less likely to become the helpless playthings of an unmerciful fate; for comfortingly in the background loomed the benevolence and moderate fortune of my grandparents, sufficient bulwark between ourselves and the shafts of misadventure, against which, I gathered, the poor had few protectors.¹⁷⁷

Other denominations could be equally remote from their Poplar congregations. The trustees of Bow Road Methodist Church were of high social status for example; only one fifth of them were manual workers and all of them were skilled.¹⁷⁸

If social status made priests remote from their flocks, their religious training often reinforced their sense of difference between themselves and their congregation. This was particularly true of Wesleyan Methodists, whose denomination stressed the authority of the minister and his absolute control over the laity.¹⁷⁹ The feelings of the Superintendent of the Wesleyan mission in Poplar, the Reverend Lax, towards his congregation reflect not only his ability but also his right to control them:

I'm a worker; not in wood, but in what you will agree is even greater -- that is, human character. That church over their is my workshop. For over twenty years I've been at it every day, and in that time (although I say it myself) I've turned out some fine bits of work.¹⁸⁰

This sense of power, based on his status as a minister, pervades the many memoirs of his life in Poplar which Lax wrote. Poplar people appear in them only as caricatures-- Mrs Benger the typical East End woman, all heart, the night-watchman the average man, decent but misguided -- and serve most often as the butt of a shared joke between the

177. Baillie, The Shabby Paradise, p.17.

178. Farmer, The Bow Story, pp.79-80.

179. Currie, Methodism Divided, pp.21-24.

180. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.21.

reader and Lax.¹⁸¹ Lax's Poplar people can be deliberately funny, but he prefers to record their unconscious mistakes, the malapropisms of the unlettered plebs.

'Where did he kick you -- in the abdomen?' inquired the minister. 'No sir,' he hastily answered, 'in the washhouse'.¹⁸²

Through these jokes, Lax is laughing at the people of Poplar. It is notable that the only middle-class memoirs which contain no hint of such patronising humour are those of Muriel Lester and John Groser, the two outsiders who seem to have been closest to Poplar's inhabitants.

For Poplar people could sense this distance between themselves and the clergy, and disliked the churches for it. An interviewee recalls that one Poplar clergyman:

wasn't very popular. He was a little bit removed from the lower classes as it were. I think they all were. I mean, my father had no time for the church.¹⁸³

Another spoke with resentment of the way the churches 'just set themselves apart'.¹⁸⁴ The rejection of the churches as bourgeois institutions by some of Poplar's Labour activists thus seems quite understandable; through both their social and religious status, priests were far removed from ordinary Poplar people, and this no doubt accounted for much of the general apathy towards the churches in the locality. The churches, Poplar Labour Party and ordinary people were not inseparably interrelated in the locality.

Religion and the right in Poplar

The difference from potential congregations bestowed on ministers by their social class and clerical training was one reason for Poplar people, including Labour councillors, to reject the churches then. Some Poplar clergy and congregations were equally dismissive of the efforts of

181. Mrs Benger appears in W.H. Lax, Adventure in Poplar (London, 1933), pp.173-74, and the night watchman in W.H. Lax, Let's Go To Poplar! (London, 1929), pp.45-52.

182. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.120.

183. interview with Mr Sumner by the author, 2.6.1987.

184. interview with Mrs Sumner.

Poplar Labour Party however. This section examines the right-wing politics to be found in Poplar's churches.

A commentator on the Christian Socialist movement in Britain remarked in 1931 that until Christians had worked out exactly what the social expression of their faith was, there would always be sceptics who refused to connect their religion to political action, and especially to party politics, and in their apathy support the status quo.¹⁸⁵ The Bishop of London was one who refused to acknowledge the need for priests to become politically active, and he disliked Groser's work in Poplar intensely as a result.¹⁸⁶ Catholic theology rejected socialism entirely,¹⁸⁷ and evangelists believed that saving souls for the next world was by far the most crucial task of churchmen and women.

The Reverend Lax fell into this last category. Although he thought little of Poplar, calling it 'a borough of mean streets, a desert, unrelieved by any middle-class oasis',¹⁸⁸ he was not interested in attempts to improve its environment. He believed that ministers of God should have nothing to do with politics,¹⁸⁹ and felt that true happiness came not from material things but from 'bringing one's life into harmony with God's will'.¹⁹⁰ Other clergy in Poplar agreed with Lax. All Hallows' Bromley was proud of its evangelical tradition and its clergy showed no interest in social affairs.¹⁹¹ The Rev Kitcat, vicar of St Mary's Bow, elected as a councillor with help from the

185. Binyon, The Christian Socialist Movement in England, p.215. Jones also makes this point in The Christian Socialist Revival, pp.449-53.

186. W. Purcell, 'Birth of a Rebel', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by K. Brill (London, 1971), pp.1-20 (p.16).

187. McEntee, The Social Catholic Movement in Great Britain, pp.95-100.

188. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.54.

189. Lax, Lax, His Book, p.197.

190. Lax, Lax, His Book, p.218.

191. All Hallows' Bromley-by-Bow, Parish Magazine, July 1927, and its Parochial Church Council meeting minutes, passim.

PBMA, refused to support the Labour Party's action in 1921.¹⁹² Reginald Kennedy-Cox at the Dockland Settlement disapproved of the General Strike and later stood as a Conservative parliamentary candidate.¹⁹³ Many PBMA members were as devout Christians as Poplar Labour Party activists; Alfred Warren was a staunch Methodist, for example.¹⁹⁴ Not all churches in Poplar were centres of Christian Socialism then.

If there was discordance between Poplar Labour Party and local churches, the picture must now be made more complex still by consideration of the fact that not all local people approved of Christian Socialism either. Many rejected its associated ritualism;¹⁹⁵ when towards the end of the decade the Anglican Prayer Book was to be revised, the vast majority of Poplar's churchgoers felt that the proposed replacement was far too Romish, particularly in its apparent support for the Catholic belief that the bread and wine became Christ during the Eucharist service. This doctrine was at the heart of Anglo-Catholic Christian Socialism, but congregations even at High and socially concerned churches like St Saviour's signed petitions of protest,¹⁹⁶ and Poplar Rural Deanery rejected the proposed revision as a result.¹⁹⁷

Some Poplar people condemned the political activism of local Christian Socialists too. John Groser received this anonymous letter after the police baton-charge at the end of the General Strike:

It is a very great joy to me to read in today's papers that you had your head badly bruised in the rioting at Poplar. With all my heart I hope it will be a permanent injury; as you are a disgrace to your flock, your country and your mother; a fit

192. Branson, Poplarism 1919-25, p.30.

193. Kennedy-Cox, Autobiography, p.249, and Through the Dock Gates, p.254.

194. East London Advertiser, 13.8.1927.

195. interview with Mr Stothard.

196. St Saviour's, Parish Magazine, August 1927, unpaginated.

197. Poplar Rural Deanery meeting minutes, 7.6.1927.

associate for Lansbury and all Russia's murderers and criminals.¹⁹⁸

Clearly, that correspondent was not a Labour supporter; his antipathy to Groser is then hardly surprising. But it must be assumed that even Labour supporters went to churches where the clergy were unsympathetic to Christian Socialism and to socialism itself. As Chapter III noted, the Dockland Settlement of Kennedy-Cox had a thousand members, which was several times the PBMA vote on the Isle of Dogs. And then there was Lax. His antipathy towards political action has been noted, but he was not therefore apolitical. Lax was a Liberal, and he was president of the Poplar Chamber of Commerce and close friends with Sir Alfred Warren, the leader of the PBMA.¹⁹⁹ These conservative political tendencies did not diminish his appeal either; remember the thousand women who came each week to his women's meeting. The local newspaper described him as 'the greatest missionary Poplar has ever known' and the streets of Poplar were packed with people paying their respects as his funeral cortege passed when he died in 1937.²⁰⁰

There is then an inconsistency within the culture of Poplar; despite the overwhelming support for Labour, people still flocked to hear right-wing preachers. The secret of Lax's popularity probably lies in his powers of oratory. Although he was a persistent visitor of the poor and sick and needy, and in order to keep his them faithful tried 'to place every member of his congregation under a personal debt of obligation by some kind of loving service rendered',²⁰¹ it was his preaching which must account for his appeal. He spoke in 'a steady stream of eloquence ... his speeches are made up of simple and natural expressions, but they are models of clever reasoning and

198. Purcell, 'Birth of a Rebel', p.16.

199. Lax, Lax, His Book, p.198; THLHL, Borough of Poplar Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report 1925-26; East London Advertiser, 5.6.1926.

200. East London Advertiser, 13.2.1937.

201. Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.190.

clear utterance'.²⁰² They were also passionate and moving, great entertainment and emotionally satisfying.²⁰³ Poplar people were vulnerable to such performances, as has already been argued. Not all communal sensibilities led inevitably to exclusive support for the Labour Party; sometimes a strong appeal to one could lead to respect for people, like Lax, with other politics.

There is no determining relationship between Poplar's religious communal sensibility and its politics then. Some Labour Party activists rejected religious belief, others rejected the social character of the churches; some clergy refused to connect faith with politics, others had right-wing sympathies; some churchgoers agreed with the Christian Socialist interpretation of the Bible and others did not.

Conclusions

Poplar's religious faith was unique among radical localities of the inter-war period. At a time of declining church attendance nationally and confused responses from the churches, Poplar's congregations were growing, with more and more people deciding to express in churches and chapels the vague religious faith they had most probably picked up at Sunday Schools. The concern of this chapter has been the relationship between religion in Poplar and the overt Christianity of Poplar Labour Party.

The chapter opened by remarking on the compatibility between the hazy Christian morality of most Poplar people and the moral aspects of Poplar Labour Party's politics, and noting that in such a context, the explicit religious convictions of local politicians like George Lansbury would not alienate them from local voters. An investigation into the more substantial connections between the Party and local religion then began by discovering the character of local churches through an examination of their strategies for attracting congregations. It was argued that, although

202. East London Advertiser, 1.7.1922.

203. Foreword by C. Ensor Walters to Lax, Lax of Poplar, p.10.

there were other church practices which drew people in-- High ritual, social activities, the sociability of women, social services -- the most important seemed to be the left-wing commitments of the minister. For almost every church in Poplar with a growing congregation in the 1920s, evidence can be found for a Christian Socialist in its pulpit. This political activism in terms of attracting congregations was especially significant to men, for politics was seen as a male arena and its appearance in the church counteracted their reputation as female institutions.

Given the hostility of Poplar people to outside organisations, be they the Church of England hierarchy or a nonconformist denomination, it was as individuals that Christian Socialist clergy could draw people into their churches. Individuals too were important to the religiosity of Poplar Labour Party; the presence of many committed Christians was the source of the Party's religiosity.

The specific effects of that religious faith on Poplar Labour Party's politics were three: pacifism, a respect for individuals, and an unshakable belief in the virtue of their actions. Although each of these reinforced and was in turn sustained by other aspects of the Party's politics, it was the confidence of believing God was on their side which made the Party to decide to risk gaol in 1921 for the sake of a more equitable Poor Law system in London. Ironically, this chapter thus claims that the episode for which Poplar has won its place in the class-theoretical literature of locality-studies did not stem from a solely class-based socialism; its crucial catalyst was the Christianity of the local Labour Party. Yet again, class politics alone have been shown to be inadequate in explaining the character of Poplar politics.

As with the previous three chapters, this one has been concerned to specify the precise contours of a communal sensibility. Who held it? How far was it communal in the sense of being widely shared? How was it gendered? What were its detailed characteristics? It has then tried to define the precise processes whereby that sensibility

affected the politics and policies of Poplar Labour Party. As with the previous three chapters also, the contingency of the relationship between culture and politics was then stressed by exploring the exceptions to the rule of interaction between Christian Socialism, Christian morality and Poplar Labour Party. The rejection of religion and the churches by some socialists has been mentioned, and the importance of religion to the right-wing PBMA and to non-Labour supporters in the population at large. There was no determining relationship between religiosity and Poplar Labour Party, only a link between a certain interpretation of the Bible and certain councillors; but it was a vital link in explaining the events of 1921.

It now remains for the concluding chapter to clarify the theoretical complexities which have emerged in the thesis so far.

CHAPTER VI

‘VOTING LABOUR WAS NATURAL’:
CONCLUSIONS EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL

The opening chapter of this thesis painted with broad brush strokes a theoretical framework with which to approach the understanding of local working-class politics. The tasks of this chapter are to return to that framework, to refine and extend it using the insights gained by the four intervening chapters of detailed historical analysis, and to assess critically the extent of the theoretical progress made. Mitchell has argued that it is precisely this sort of theoretical discussion on which the validity of a case study must rest.¹ He argues that the usual criticism of the case study method -- its lack of representativeness -- misunderstands the nature of the technique. Not the typicality of the case selected but the internal coherence and validity of its arguments are the criteria by which the case study must be evaluated: that is, by its theoretical adequacy.² Such a judgement of this particular case study will be easier to make after this chapter has clarified its theoretical underpinnings.

The degree to which theory should be modified by the empirical findings of a case study is of course a contentious issue among locality-study writers; debate revolves around the question of how far non-observable

1. J.C. Mitchell, 'Case and Situation Analysis', Sociological Review, 31 (1983), 187-211.

2. Compare this with Sayer and Morgan's 'intensive research' strategy which aims to reveal structural causal entities at work through case studies; A. Sayer and K. Morgan, 'A Modern Industry in a Declining Region: Links Between Method, Theory and Policy', in Politics and Method: Contrasting Studies in Industrial Geography, edited by D. Massey and R. Meegan (London, 1985), pp.147-68. Nevertheless, comparability between case studies remains a major worry for some locality-study theorists; see A. Warde, 'Comparable Localities: Some Problems of Method', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group (London, 1985), pp.54-76.

causal entities can be reconceptualised in the light of observable data, with structuralists like Harvey and Smith accusing certain locality studies of empiricism.³ That controversy is irrelevant to this study, however, because the structuralist ontology underlying it has been rejected. The hermeneutic approach deployed here instead relies entirely on the close study and interpretation of social life; empirical work is its very lifeblood. Interpretive approaches certainly involve theoretical conclusions, however. They aim explicitly to produce 'broader interpretations and more abstract analyses from the direction of extremely extended acquaintance with extremely small matters',⁴ trying 'to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured, social facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics'.⁵ The densely textured facts of this thesis relate to the politics of Poplar borough, which have been contextualised in terms of four aspects of local culture: the ideologies of class; the discourses of citizenship, a neighbourhood ethic and religious faith. The 'large conclusions' of the thesis therefore concern the nature of the relation of culture to political life.

Three theoretical issues concerning the political role of culture have been clarified through the engagement with the specifics of Poplar. These are the nature of communal sensibilities, the relationship between culture and politics, and the concept of locality. Each of these will now be discussed in turn before the final section assesses

3. P. Cooke, 'Clinical Inference and Geographic Theory', Antipode, 19 (1987), 69-78; D. Harvey and others, 'Reconsidering Social Theory: A Debate', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 5 (1987), 367-434; A. Sayer, 'Industry and Space: A Sympathetic Critique of Radical Research', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 3 (1985), 3-29; N. Smith, 'Dangers of the Empirical Turn: Some Comments on the CURS Initiative', Antipode, 19 (1987), 59-68.

4. C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York, 1973), p.21.

5. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, p.28.

their advantages over the understanding of local politics prevalent in locality studies.

I The nature of communal sensibilities

The organising concept of this thesis has been the notion of 'communal sensibilities'. Following Geertz, the first chapter defined communal sensibilities as 'frames of awareness', or the ways in which people make sense of the world. The main contention throughout has been that the politics of Poplar in the 1920s are incomprehensible without an appreciation of the influence of these frames of awareness on Poplar's politicians and their actions. But what exactly is the nature of this influence? What are communal sensibilities and how are they related to social action? Given his belief in the fundamental importance of description based on fieldwork to the conceptualisation of culture, Geertz himself is reluctant to theorise in the abstract about the nature of communal sensibilities. He states in passing merely that they are contradictory, exist only insofar as they are expressed in social action, and are geographically-bounded. The following three subsections examines each of these three aspects.

The nature of communal sensibilities

The first point to make is that each communal sensibility must be conceptualised to a certain degree as a law unto itself; each has its own language and logic irreducible to any other. That is not to suggest that there can be no overlap or mutual reinforcement among sensibilities, nor is it to argue that there were no contradictions and debates within each discourse for, as will shortly be shown, such interaction and conflict did occur. But it does emphasise that each sensibility embodies a rhetoric and a set of assumptions of its own. Thus the pacifism of Poplar Labour Party, for example, can be deconstructed to reveal its several culturally discrete motivations: Sylvia Pankhurst's socialism, George Lansbury's and Muriel Lester's Christianity, the hatred of war which many women

felt as mothers. The full meaning of pacifism in the borough can only be seen by its dissection into these constituent parts.

Given the irreducibility of any one sensibility to another, it is not surprising that contradictions existed between them. Thus the ideology of class rejected the notion of community advocated by the PBMA, the religious pacifism of sections of Poplar Labour Party led to its rejection of the communist strategy of revolution by violence, the shop stewards' movement rejected welfare work in workplaces, neighbourhood insularity co-existed with popular campaigns demanding an end to British intervention in Russia and Turkey and China.

If there were contradictions between communal sensibilities, there were also conflicts of interpretation within them; their internal coherence must not be exaggerated. Although they could give rise to agreement between groups often seen as implacable opposites -- the shared assumption of both Poplar Labour Party and the PBMA that responsibility for the alleviation of unemployment lay with central government was mentioned in chapter II, for example -- there were also internal contradictions. The discussion of class ideologies noted the differences between the trade unions and Poplar Labour Party, between Poplar Labour Party and the UWO, between the NUWCM and the UWO, and between the WSF and just about everybody; a commitment to democracy could result in the reformism of Poplar Labour Party or the anti-parliamentarianism of the WSF; social work could use the notion of citizenship to promote dutiful servants of the state or to legitimate pacifist internationalists who rejected the secular state in favour of God's kingdom; neighbourhoods encouraged mutuality within a group of streets but conflict between them; Christianity found room for both the right-wing sympathies of the Reverend Lax and the socialism of John Groser and William Dick.

Further, the social practices of each aspect of Poplar's culture were refracted through the lens of gender. Ideologies of class were reinforced by appeals to manhood, as chapter II noted; strikes were encouraged by activists

in the labour movement not only on the grounds of class, but also on the basis of appeals to men's masculinity. The discussion of citizenship suggested that, like class ideologies, the discourses of citizen, state and community could not be fully understood without a recognition of the importance of gender. The gendered identity of women encouraged them to become self-sacrificing social workers, for example, dedicated to the betterment of Poplar people's lives, losing their own ego in their desire to serve. The neighbourhood was of course the sphere within which most Poplar women lived their lives; they maintained its social relations and conviviality in their everyday practices perhaps more than men did. The churches too were gendered. Women attended them as adults much more frequently than did men, and turned them into feminine sociable institutions. The concern of the churches to increase their congregations thus focussed especially on men, and gender-specific techniques were used to make churchgoing attractive to men. Thus each element of Poplar's culture appears to have involved men and women in different ways.

Geertz's characterisation of a culture as contradictory, as an octopus with its limbs only poorly co-ordinated, thus seems entirely accurate. The irreducibility of the culture's constituent communal sensibilities, and the contradictions within and between them and their gendering, affirm that culture is not a coherent and unitary whole, but is fragmented and inconsistent.

The social expression of communal sensibilities

Having to some extent clarified the nature of frames of awareness, or sensibilities, their portrait must be made more complex by a consideration of the ways in which they relate to social action.

Initially, the thesis accepted Geertz's view of this relation. He argues that communal sensibilities find expression solely through social action and he therefore describes human behaviour as symbolic action.⁶ Yet one

6. Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, p.10.

crucial aspect of Poplar's culture has been recovered as only partially 'envehicled', to use a Geertzian term, in social behaviour: the neighbourhood ethic. That ethic was expressed to some extent in the conviviality and mutuality of neighbourhood life, and chapter IV discussed the ways in which Poplar Labour Party integrated itself into these social practices. But that chapter also argued that the most significant impact of the neighbourhood on the Party's politics was the idea of neighbourhood, not its reality. The reality involved insularity, snobbery and conflict, as well as sociability and sharing; but it was exclusively these latter values which offered a model of a socialistic way of life to Poplar's Labour politicians. The argument that culture is of no causal significance unless it is embodied in social action must therefore be modified. Certain aspects of a culture may be autonomous from social behaviour and yet still exert an influence. This is perhaps especially significant when the political consequences of a culture are under examination, for radical politics deal in dreams and desires, in building better worlds, and can thus appeal perhaps more than any other form of action to ideals which as yet have no social expression.

Geertz's formulation of the relationship between culture and social life must therefore be revised and an alternative means of relating cultural awarenesses to social action found which allows for a disjuncture between the awareness and social processes. Such an alternative will now be developed, drawing on the work of the geographer John Agnew.

Agnew's aim is to demonstrate the relevance of place to knowledge, and central to his arguments is a certain relationship between local knowledge and social processes.⁷ (Agnew is concerned with political knowledge in particular, but for the purposes of the present argument his conclusions concerning political knowledge will be extended to cover all cultural knowledges and frames of awareness). Agnew stresses not the social expression of knowledge, not

7. J.A. Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society (London, 1987).

the social embodiment of culture in social routines and processes, as does Geertz, but the idea that geographically specific social routines represent the reproduction of a culture because they embody the sharing of ideas and understandings between people. For this insight he is indebted to Pred, who suggests that in seventeenth-century Boston the common social routine of many individual merchants as they met each other in coffee houses and at dinner parties created 'a deepening of collective consciousness' as ideas were shared and discussed among them.⁸ Using this argument, Agnew can conclude that 'place-specific ... patterns of social interaction give rise to specific patterns of political behaviour' (p.44). The cultural importance of social interaction thus lies in the interpretations of experience which are made available by that interaction. People carry the ideas which make sense of experience, and it is the interaction of people which make those ideas accessible and politically relevant, even if the ideas remain unacted upon, as the neighbourhood ethic often was in Poplar. Agnew's work accounts for the disjuncture between the behaviour and ethic of Poplar's neighbourhoods.

Given the centrality of social life to culture, it seems important to explore social interaction in a little more detail. How do people interact with each other to transmit ideas? Several social theorists have argued that all knowledge is socially created, and from their work a simple distinction between two kinds of socialisation into a common cultural knowledge can be made.⁹

8. A. Pred, 'Structuration, Biography Formation and Knowledge: Observations on Port Growth in the Late Mercantile Period', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 2 (1984), 251-275 (p.269). Agnew is in fact a little ambiguous on this point and implies that the shared experience of social life also contributes to common knowledges. Given the highly problematic nature of the category 'experience', this is a much less acceptable connection to make between social life and local knowledge than Pred's emphasis on shared discourses.

9. for a general discussion, see N. Thrift, 'Flies and Germs: A Geography of Knowledge', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.366-403. The distinction between

The first type of socialisation is primary and occurs in childhood, and during it the child learns how to make sense of the world through the lessons of the adults which surround her; that is, she learns her most basic cultural sensibilities when very young. In Poplar, it seems likely that the two most fundamental communal sensibilities, inculcated from birth, were the neighbourhood ethic and, probably, a vague Christian morality. So central were these knowledges, or communal sensibilities, to social life in Poplar that Poplar's Labour councillors and Guardians, almost all locally born, would have drunk them in with their mother's milk. Those sensibilities would therefore have been part of the identities of Labour activists, and chapter IV, drawing on the arguments of Shils, argued that this was one reason for the loyalty of Poplar people to their local Labour Party; the Party activists, socialised in Poplar, could appeal to understandings and meanings of basic significance to local people. The social networks which carried these crucial meanings were those of the family and the neighbourhood; in the time-geographic terms of Agnew and Pred, their locales were the home, the corner shop, the street.

The other form of socialisation which can be identified is secondary socialisation. This is any process occurring after primary socialisation which integrates an individual into other sectors of her society. There are many possibilities here. The thesis has been at pains to trace both the individual contacts which shaped a person's adult beliefs -- Groser and Lansbury, for example -- and the attempts by local institutions to publicise their local knowledges and discourses to a wider audience through group activities. The procession, for example, was mentioned in the previous chapter as a means by which the churches, trade unions, the unemployed, the peace movement, charities and the Labour Party took their various messages literally on to the streets to influence people's way of thinking.

primary and secondary socialisation is fully developed in P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (New York, 1966).

From this it can be seen that the geography of secondary socialisation within Poplar was more spatially specific than that of primary socialisation. It was confined mostly to public spaces: the dock gates, the Town Hall, Kingsley Hall, churches, the East India Dock Road, to name but a few locations.

Unlike primary socialisation, however, secondary socialisation also had connections to a wider sphere of debate and discussion. Lansbury for example travelled the country to bring socialism to people, and in the process met and discussed ideas with activists who had no connection to Poplar. Muriel Lester's politics depended largely on her visits to India in the mid-1920s and the conversations she had there with Gandhi. Thus Poplar's politicians and professionals especially drew their knowledges and sensibilities from a much wider arena than Poplar alone, and this suggests that aspects of Poplar's culture were not evenly distributed among its population. While the knowledges endowed by primary socialisation were widespread in Poplar, with everyone advocating neighbourliness and a sort of Christian morality, other frames of awareness were possessed by only a few. Although many people considered themselves workers, only a few were class-conscious in the Marxist sense, for example. Similarly, while many people espoused a vague Christianity, few went to church and even fewer were actively engaged in the Christian Socialist controversy, and the discourses of citizenship were debated more heatedly by political activists and social workers than by the average person on the street. The sensibilities of the mass of people and of articulate minorities were not the same. So although in some ways local political activists were typical of local people, in others, particularly in their possession of less widely espoused beliefs, they were highly unusual.

This discussion sheds some doubt on appositeness of the term 'communal sensibilities'. 'Communal' suggests a widespread awareness shared by virtually everyone in a community, and in Poplar this description applies only to certain sensibilities, primarily those of neighbourhood and Christian morality. Once again, the arguments of Geertz

must be modified. Henceforth, the term 'communal sensibilities' will be used to refer to these two mass characteristics of neighbourliness and morality, and the term 'restricted knowledge' will be used to indicate those more abstract and less widely shared frames of awareness: class, citizenship and active religious faith.

Political ideas and local culture

The third aspect of Geertz's notion of culture was its geographical specificity: culture as local knowledge. The first chapter, in its concern for the geography of culture, suggested a way in which specific places might make a difference to communal sensibilities and restricted knowledges. It argued that since these sensibilities and knowledges were spatially delimited and, presumably, unevenly developed over space, they would be present in particular locations to varying degrees. It might then be the unique configuration of local knowledges which could account for the shape of a local culture. The metaphor of a cake with different flavoured layers of different depths was used, with its overall taste being determined by the proportion of each layer in a particular slice. This section will see to what extent those ideas about the geography of culture can be sustained.

It is clear that the accumulation of diverse cultural components produced the politics of Poplar Labour Party. The ideology of class contributed to its identification with the working class and its stress on participation, women's issues and the public provision of services. The discourse of citizenship strengthened its commitment to local democracy and its belief that the needs of Poplar were more important than the demands of the central state. The ethic of the neighbourhood encouraged its generous and non-punitive relief policy and its collectivism. And the religious faith of many activists reinforced the Party's pacifism, its belief in the rights of the individual person, and its self-confidence. The mechanism by which these cultural awarenesses were transmitted into the local Labour Party's policies was the social networks within

which the Party was imbricated, and this specific combination of elements was the original argument in favour of the importance of place to local politics.

But a consequence of the argument that the interaction of people and their beliefs created the character of Poplar Labour Party is that ideas do not merely accumulate in a geographically-unique combination; they also have an effect on each other. People do not carry ideas in water-tight, or thought-tight, compartments in their head; ideas fuse and mesh. Thus, although, as was earlier asserted, each communal sensibility retained its own logic, aspects of each were accentuated or obscured by the co-presence of other arguments and ideas. Thus the existence of a radical Labour Party encouraged the popularity of Christian Socialism among Poplar's clergy, Christian faith emphasised the left-wingers' arguments for pacifism, the socialism of various left-wing groups sustained radical social workers in Poplar. Above all, the politics of Poplar Labour Party were created as something unique from this local 'rebel milieu'. The metaphor of a cake of separate layers cannot be sustained therefore, because it does not represent this fusion of ideas which constituted a truly local culture. The interaction between restricted knowledges and communal sensibilities, caused by local social networks, is the significance of place to culture and to politics.

This section has refined the sketchy ideas of Geertz in the light of the study of Poplar. To summarise: cultural sensibilities and knowledges are not always embodied in social action; culture is not equivalent to social life. But through the networks of people meeting and discussing, gossiping and arguing, ideas are shared; social life makes sensibilities available rather than envehicles them. And social networks combine knowledges in places, and in that combination awarenesses are altered and other, truly local knowledges, are created alongside others which maintain their more general and abstract qualities. Certain knowledges, of class, citizenship and religion, although modified by their co-presences in Poplar, retained their conceptual independence and widespread applicability;

there was no indigenous theory of class exploitation in Poplar, for example. But the local knowledge embodied in the politics of Poplar Labour Party was truly local, the result of a unique fusion of cultural awarenesses.

III Culture and politics

The previous section clarified a theory of culture for 1920s Poplar, suggesting that because of its distinct constituent rhetorics, its varying degree of social embodiment, its uneven social distribution and the spatial diversity of its social expressions, Poplar's culture was diverse, contradictory and fragmented. This section begins by considering the meaning of politics in Poplar more carefully, and then turns to the relationship between the local culture and local politics.

A definition of radical politics

So far in this thesis, politics has been referred to in rather a loose sense, as synonymous with the policies of political parties; politics has been what political parties do. This definition is inadequate however since it is wholly descriptive and thus allows no critical commentary on a party's politics. It cannot distinguish between a radical politics and a conservative one. A more precise definition is necessary because the later arguments of this section concerning the relationship between politics and culture depend on a distinction between radical and conservative political strategies.

Any definition must of course be historically sensitive; to reach an essentialist notion of radicalism would be antithetical to the spirit of this thesis. The aspect of Poplar Labour Party in the 1920s which, as has been argued, managed to antagonise both the right and the left of the political spectrum and thus might be judged as its most radical was its commitment to democracy, to the participation of all in government and to the emancipation of all. It should be noted here that one especially important source of this radicalism was the politics of

women in Poplar. By virtue of their socially-constructed gender roles, many Poplar women had a particularly critical attitude to the state. As chapter II remarked, women's role as carers and mothers was utilised by internationalist peace groups like the League of Nations Union and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in support of the League of Nations and against the belligerent sabre-rattling of nation-states. And women's struggle for suffrage, in which many Poplar women were involved, resulted not just in resistance to the state's disenfranchisement of women; as chapter II argued in connection with the WSF, it also produced a comprehensive critique of state repression with issues such as prison reform, conscription, and the erosion of civil liberties caused by the Defence of the Realm and the Contagious Diseases Acts making the headlines in the Workers' Dreadnought.¹⁰ In Poplar, knowledge of the repressive aspects of the central state was intimate, and came especially from the politics of local women.

As chapter II noted, this concern to resist state oppression is returning to the political agenda; for both the 1920s and the 1980s, the crucial radical political issue which challenges the orthodoxies of conservatives and socialists alike is democracy. The current revival of interest in democracy among contemporary political theorists helps to clarify the implications of Poplar Labour Party's less fully articulated ideas. These implications will now be explored in order to reach an historically sensitive definition of radical politics.

Democracy is a means of regulating the relationship between the state and civil society, 'between the complex network of political institutions (including the military, legal, administrative, productive and cultural organs of the state) and the realm of social activities (privately-owned, market-directed, voluntarily-run or friendship-based) which are legally recognised and guaranteed by the

10. Interestingly, a major contemporary theorist of democracy lists many of these concerns as central to his revised socialist politics. True democracy cannot flourish surrounded by repressive state apparatus, he explains; J. Keane, Democracy and Civil Society (London, 1988), p.24.

state';¹¹ democracy it limits the power of the state over civil society and thus allows all people the full development their abilities as social creatures.¹² Like certain contemporary political theorists, Poplar Labour Party was concerned to control the power of the state over civil society in order to liberate individual citizens; certainly it wanted to see a truly emancipatory society, in which every individual would be free to fulfil themselves, 'developing the spiritual side of life', as George Lansbury said.¹³

And in both the 1920s and the 1980s, local states have been important sites of resistance to the central state by attempting to democratise the link between the local state and its local civil society.¹⁴ Of course, there are obvious differences between local socialism then and now, particularly in terms of policies for women and ethnic minorities; but remember the public meetings and processions and letters to schoolchildren and responsiveness to local pressure groups like the NUWM of Poplar Labour Party in the early 1920s and compare them to this comment by David Blunkett, one of the leaders of the 'new urban left' of the 1980s:

There has been a total reappraisal of the role of local government in the 1980s. This is not an entirely new approach, but a return in a sense to earlier years, when people saw local government as a very positive tool for making progress, for establishing democracy in its truest sense with

11. Keane, Democracy and Civil Society, p.3.

12. for a detailed account of arguments for the self-development inherent in the democratic process, see C. Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory (Cambridge, 1970), especially pp.22-44.

13. E. Lansbury, George Lansbury. My Father (London, 1934), p.15.

14. Discussions of democracy and civil society rarely mention the division of the state into the local and the central. When they do, it is in such a way as to assume, as Poplar Labour Party argued, that the local state can be much more concerned with participation and true democracy than the central. The implication is that it is the central state which is the real threat to democracy; see Keane, Democracy and Civil Society, pp.19-20.

people actually participating in decisions as to how their resources were to be used.¹⁵

In the light of these concerns with freedom and democracy, the politics of Poplar Labour Party define radical politics as giving power to ordinary people and limiting the encroachment of the central state into a locality. The degree of freedom of civil society from the control of the central state advocated by the party was a gauge of its political radicalism.

The contingent relation between culture and politics

Why is it important to define radical politics? The politics of Poplar Labour Party cannot be understood simply as a response to some kind of local need, and this thesis has been concerned to explain its radicalism by exploring the rhetoric of the Party, deciphering and interpreting it in the context of Poplar's culture.¹⁶ The theorisation of culture in chapter I, however, insisted that culture does not determine action, political or otherwise. Inspired by this point, the influence of local sensibilities and knowledges on the PBMA and local employers have been recounted as evidence of the uncertain political outcome of Poplar's culture. However, it is difficult to claim that either employers or wealthy ratepayers drew upon exactly the same culture as a manual labourer turned Labour councillor who had lived in Poplar all his life; to claim that the politics of both Poplar Labour Party and the PBMA stemmed from the same culture is thus not wholly convincing as evidence for the non-determining nature of culture. More credible by far would

15. interview with D. Blunkett in Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives, edited by M. Boddy and C. Fudge (London, 1984), pp.242-60 (p.243). On the new urban left more generally, see J. Gyford, The Politics of Local Socialism (London, 1985).

16. for an assertion from a very different theoretical tradition of the importance of politics rather than need to local government policy, see L.J. Sharpe and K. Newton, Does Politics Matter? The Determinants of Public Policy (Oxford, 1984).

be a change in the politics of Poplar Labour Party during the 1920s when there were no major cultural shifts.

That is just what this section offers. The relationship between Poplar's culture and the politics of its Labour Party will be problematised by describing the non-radical politics of the Party at the end of the 1920s and arguing that they were as closely connected to local culture as were its earlier, radical strategies; hence the need to define radical politics, in order to distinguish this change clearly. This section is concerned to emphasise that the political consequences of a culture are shaped by its combination of communal sensibilities and restricted knowledges, but not in any consistent way. The political implications of a culture are indeterminate.

The way in which Poplar Labour Party's radicalism had declined by the end of the 1920s was outlined in criticisms made of it by both the ILP and local Communists. The ILP was certainly disaffected with the Party by the early 1930s. An ILP manifesto for local elections in that period proclaimed:

ALL POWER TO THE WORKERS: USE YOUR TOWN COUNCILS!
... use the machinery of local government to express the will of the workers.¹⁷

This echoed the belief of Poplar Labour Party in the early 1920s in the need to mobilise workers into taking control of local government, and the same manifesto continued by listing many of the other demands the Party had been making: better housing, free municipal health care, the national funding of the unemployed, a more equitable rating system. Yet in 1933 an ILP candidate stood against the Labour Party nominee in a council by-election because he felt that Labour had accepted the constraints of capitalism and had ceased to struggle for its old ideals.¹⁸ By the late 1920s the Communist remnants of the WSF were critical of Poplar Labour Party too. In 1928, after Communist Party policy changed to opposing Labour candidates instead of supporting them, these few individuals, like Mrs Walker and John O'Sullivan, formed a body called the Poplar

17. Communist Party Library, C.K. Cullen papers, file 89.

18. East End News, 23.9.1932; Cullen papers, file 89b.

The Workers' Socialist Federation view of
Poplar Labour Party.

The scene is of the police ejecting members of the UWO
from the Board of Guardians' meeting in October 1923.

The caption reads BROTHERLY LOVE, a parody of
George Lansbury's religiosity. Lansbury and John Scurr are
caricatured in the top right hand corner of the sketch.

Source: Workers' Dreadnought, 6.10.1923



BROTHERLY LOVE

Workers' Electoral Committee to campaign against Poplar Labour Party in the local elections.¹⁹ Of course the WSF had always been critical of the Labour Party, as chapter II recorded, but the criticism of its ex-activists was now directed not, as in the early 1920s, against the logical impossibility of democratic revolution, but against the specific policies of the Party. It accused Labour of becoming the puppet of the Ministry of Health and of holding private meetings hidden from public scrutiny.²⁰ Poplar Labour Party had apparently lost both its will to resist the power of the central state and its commitment to open and emancipatory politics.

This section will demonstrate and explain the veracity of these accusations of right-wing docility and secrecy within Poplar Labour Party in terms of each of Poplar's four restricted knowledges and communal sensibilities on which this thesis has focussed, in order to show how each element of Poplar's culture could support both radical and non-radical politics of the local Labour Party.

Class

The class politics of Poplar Labour Party were a crucial component of their radical view of the relationship between civil society and the state. As chapter II recounted, the pressure from the NUWM contributed towards the council's generous relief policy and its provision of public relief works for the unemployed; the WSF, particularly during the Jolly George incident, encouraged the Labour Party to defy the central state; the commitment of the ILP to local democracy encouraged Poplar council's defiance of central government in the name of local accountability. The distance which Poplar Labour Party had travelled away from this early class-based commitment to open socialist government by the late 1920s will now be described.

19. for details of the Communist Party's relationship with the Labour Party in the later 1920s, see J. Redman, The Communist Party and the Labour Left 1925-29 (Hull, 1957).

20. THLHL, Poplar Workers' Electoral Committee handbill 1928 Board of Guardians election.

Poplar council became increasingly remote from local pressure groups; committees gradually began to refuse to see deputations, with the Works Committee for example refusing in 1927 to see both TGWU delegates about their working conditions and a delegation of costermongers whom the council were beginning to licence.²¹ The Housing Committee were increasingly concerned to select 'respectable' tenants rather than the most needy and to evict families for the non-payment of rent.²² Party manifestoes were repeated at election after election, lacking new ideas.²³ In 1929, Poplar's Guardians refused to house a group of hunger marchers passing through the borough, a clear indication of a lessening of the Party's sympathy with the organised unemployed.²⁴ And by the end of the decade an elite of snobby Labour councillors had developed who were distinctly unfriendly towards the PWLG.²⁵ As chapter IV recounted, the PWLG was a popular sociable institution and its rejection shows that some at least of Poplar's councillors were severing their links with the Party's early integration into the borough's community life.

This aloofness was complemented by a growing gap in status between ordinary people in the borough and their councillors and guardians. A great many of Poplar's Labour councillors used their office in order to increase their status. This ranged from the enthusiastic pursuit of small perks -- Charlie Key for example never forgot to collect the free electric kettle due to him each year as the chair of the council's Electricity Committee -- to a scandal in which Dave Adams was accused of taking sexual advantage of

21. THLHL, PMBC Works Committee, minutes of meetings, 16.5.1927 and 11.10.1927.

22. THLHL, PMBC Housing Committee, minutes of meetings, passim.

23. THLHL, election handbills collection.

24. PRO, MH57/98, minute 22.1.1929.

25. interview by the author with Mr Barker, 22.6.1987.

a women resident in Poplar's workhouse,²⁶ to what the Ministry of Health described as hob-nobbing. One of its inspectors noted:

It is unfortunately true that the class from which the majority of the Poplar Guardians are drawn is often quite incapable of dealing with the senior officers employed by them. They are far too apt to 'hob-nob' with their officers, to drink with them, and to be on terms of close personal friendship.²⁷

This personal intimacy between locally elected representatives and middle-class professionals meant that Poplar's Labour councillors were moving in social circles far removed from their own, and seen not to be their own by local people; chapter IV discussed the sensitivity of Poplar people to questions of status. A small indication of this growing distance between councillors and voters is shown in the map overleaf. It records that in 1929, 15 Labour councillors lived in the wards they represented in the council chamber; map 6 however showed that in 1919 26 did so. Poplar Labour Party was beginning to become more remote from local people, and other aspects of this distancing will be discussed later.

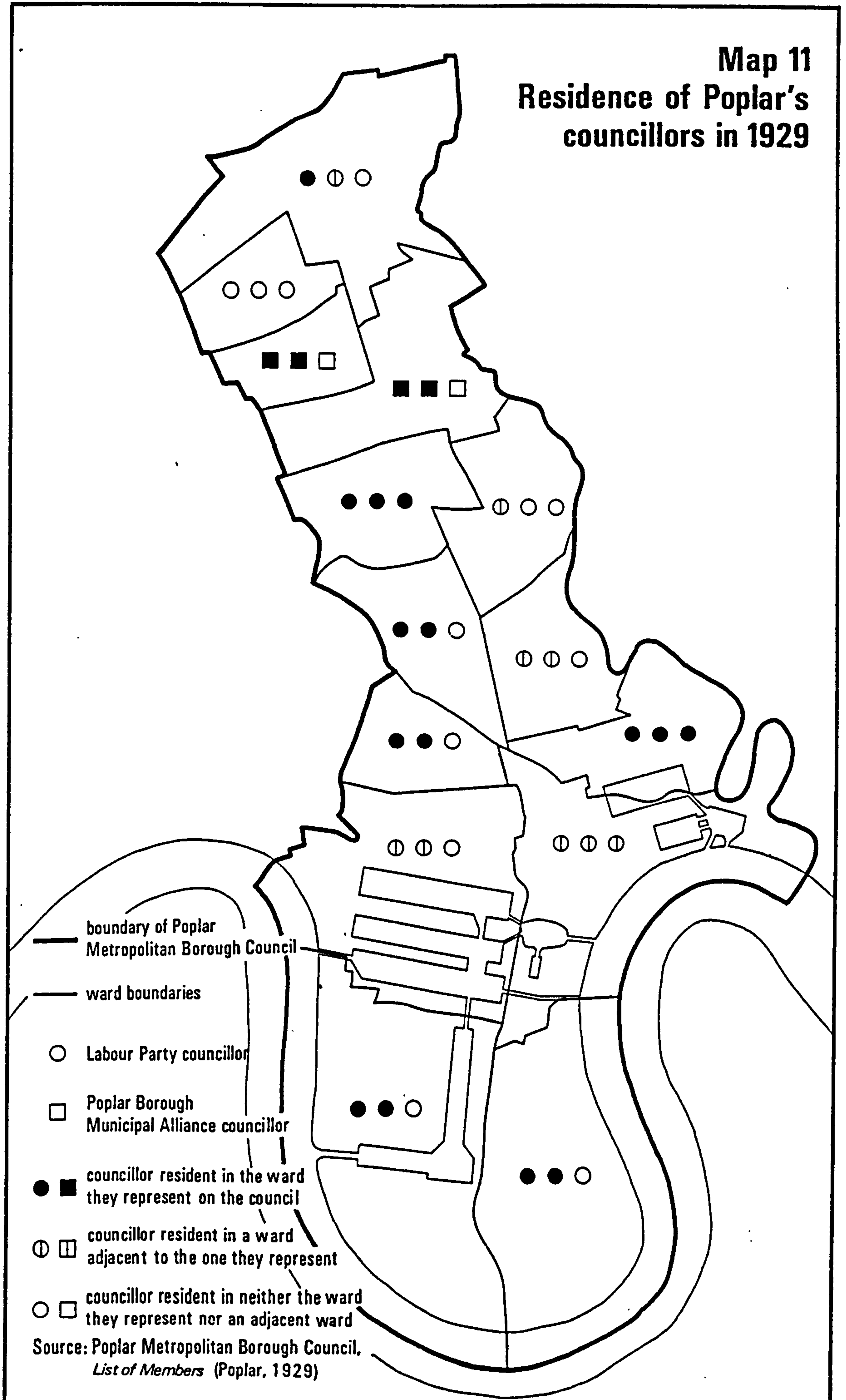
The reasons for this change in the relationship between Poplar Labour Party and local organisations and people are several. The reaction of all councillors to office no doubt played a part; Hill has suggested that the longer councillors remain in office the more their perception of their role changes from seeing themselves as delegates responsible to the people to feeling themselves a trustee for voters,²⁸ and this may have affected some of Poplar's councillors. Rather more specific reasons for the change in Poplar Labour Party's attitude towards local people can also be offered however. Some are discussed later; here the concern is with the character of the Party's class ideology.

26. interview with Mr Barker; East London Advertiser, 19.10.1929 and 9.11.1929.

27. PRO, MH68/213, minute 10.5.1929.

28. D.M. Hill, Democratic Theory and Local Government (London, 1974), p.141.

Map 11
Residence of Poplar's
councillors in 1929



As chapters II and III argued, Poplar Labour Party's commitment to close relations with its local civil society depended on its left-wing faith in local democracy. If that left-wing politics grew weaker, so too would the Party's attempts to communicate often and openly with local people. In Poplar as elsewhere during the 1920s, the revolutionary flame began to flicker and die as the decade wore on, and was finally snuffed out by the failure of the General Strike in 1926 to help the miners. In Poplar, this decline in socialist ardour was accentuated by the disappearance of several of its most left-wing activists. The communist Minnie Lansbury died early in 1922, later the same year George Lansbury regained his parliamentary seat and began to spend much more time in Westminster, Edgar Lansbury did not stand for election in Poplar's 1925 local elections because he was hoping for a parliamentary constituency elsewhere,²⁹ John Scurr left Poplar for Stepney in 1925 and was in any case becoming increasingly right-wing,³⁰ Charlie Sumner died in 1925 and the communist Alf Watts died in 1928. In addition to these individual losses, one of the organisations at least partially responsible for the Party's radicalism became less influential as the '20s progressed; the unemployed movements declined as the total out of work fell (see table 6).

Nonetheless, this shift to the right does not necessarily mean that the ideology of class no longer found a foothold in Poplar Labour Party. Left-wing political ideology was not the only source of the class politics of Poplar's socialists. As was argued in chapter IV, the working class was defined by the Party in terms of the poor and the deprived. To define oneself as working-class, as almost all Poplar's Labour activists proudly did, was to take on this identification, and Gyford has described the temptations of office to working-class people denied power and influence for decades, as Poplar's councillors and Guardians had been, in just these terms. He suggests that

29. East London Advertiser, 31.10.1925.

30. East London Advertiser, 7.11.1925 and 1.12.1928.

class consciousness as a sense of deprivation ironically could lead to exactly those status-grabbing techniques of Key and Adams described above.

Local politics has provided the only avenue to a recognition and public status otherwise denied by society to many manual workers. In a status-conscious society [which Poplar was] it is hardly surprising that once attained, it should be clung to for dear life.³¹

Thus it can be argued that the class ideology of Poplar Labour Party explains both its earlier egalitarianism and its later elitism. Once the advocates of its democratic ethos had fallen silent, the Party's understanding of class paradoxically encouraged a growing social gulf between councillors and Poplar people.

Citizenship

Chapter III explained that the belief of Poplar Labour Party in democracy and close relations between the local state and local civil society depended on a discourse of citizenship as well as on left-wing ideologies, and it was suggested that associated with this rhetoric of citizenship was a certain constitutionalism. This constitutionalism was reinforced in the later 1920s by several developments, the effect of which was to increase the control of the central state over Poplar and thus reduce its radicalism.

The first was the rise to prominence in the Party of Charlie Key. Key was a very bright man but his skills tended towards the exploitation of existing loopholes in the law rather than organising the erection of barricades, and his expertise had the additional debilitating effect of making other councillors lazy and over-reliant on him.³² Key's eminence encouraged the essential reformism of Poplar Labour Party.

Another individual crucial to the increase in the Party's timidity was the new clerk to the Guardians appointed in 1926. In order to make local government as

31. J. Gyford, Local Politics in Britain, second edition (London, 1984), p.63.

32. interview with councillor Overland in G. Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar (London, 1975), pp.91-94 (p.92).

responsive as possible to local desires, Poplar Labour Party had a policy of selecting new officers who were sympathetic to their cause. This usually took the form of encouraging trade unionism,³³ although individuals' political loyalty was also assessed by the council before employment. The manager of Roman Road Baths was the vice-president of Bow and Bromley Labour Party, for example,³⁴ and the PBMA believed that the extra relieving officers employed by the council at times of heavy demand for relief were all socialists;³⁵ certainly one of them was Labour councillor Joe O'Callaghan.³⁶ The Party also found several officers already at work when Labour won office in 1919 to be supporters of their ideas, and all this led the Borough Accountant in the 1920s to boast that no council could better the friendship that existed between Poplar councillors and their officers.³⁷ This friendship was part of the elitism of Poplar's Labour councillors of course, but in the early 1920s it helped the council to defy central government; the clerk to the Guardians, for example, was central to the success of Poplarism.³⁸ None-

33. The Ministry of Health was especially concerned at this strategy; PRO, HLG51/67, HLG51/68, HLG51/71 refer to Poplar specifically and HLG68/16 discusses the principles the Ministry believed to be at stake. Gillespie argues that policies like that of Poplar council were the source of trade unionism in east London; J.A. Gillespie, 'Economic and Political Change in the East End of London During the 1920s' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1984).

34. East London Advertiser, 2.9.1933.

35. PRO, MH68/214, report of PBMA delegation to the Ministry of Health, 20.2.1922.

36. East End News, 16.3.1926.

37. East End News, 16.4.1944. The Superintendent Relieving Officer in Poplar Guardians' North Street office was elected as a Labour councillor to the London County Council, for example, and the Assistant Tuberculosis Officer was secretary of Poplar ILP: East London Advertiser, 28.1.1933; PMBC, Annual Report on the Sanitary Condition and Vital Statistics of the Metropolitan Borough of Poplar by the Medical Officer of Health 1925-26 (Poplar, 1926), p.vii.

38. East End News, 26.10.1945.

theless, many of Poplar's officers were not always fully supportive of the Party's policies. In 1921 for example, the Borough Surveyor agreed to the Ministry of Health's cost-cutting suggestion that a council housing project should be built with four-roomed flats rather than the five he knew the council wanted,³⁹ and the Medical Officer of Health complained to the Ministry of Health that the council had established a birth control clinic without his full approval.⁴⁰ The most important of Poplar's officers unsympathetic to the Labour Party, however, was that new clerk to the Guardians. He set to work immediately to stabilise the Board's finances and to reduce its debt. In September 1927 the guardians sent him to the Ministry of Health to offer £15,000 raised by spending cutbacks as repayment of outstanding loans, and in February 1928 he was back in Whitehall assuring the Ministry that he could persuade the Poplar Guardians to repay much larger sums, perhaps £80,000 a year until all debts were cleared.⁴¹ The Ministry must have been delighted to receive a letter from the Poplar Board the following week agreeing to this figure.⁴² The presence in a key position of an officer who disliked Poplar's debt-financing strategies was a clear weakness in the council's battle with the Ministry of Health.

The constitutionalism of Poplar Labour Party, reinforced by the influences of Key and the clerk, had a greater impact on the council's policies later in the decade than earlier; it was a worsening liability because it legitimated several new laws and judicial and ministerial decisions which operated to curb the Party's radicalism. In the early 1920s, Poplar's continued defiance of the Ministry's wishes produced a certain paranoia among civil servants; one spoke of Poplar as being

39. PRO, HLG49/62, minutes 10.11.1921 and 18.11.1921.

40. PRO, MH66/371, Public Health Survey of PMBC, 16.3.1931, p.62.

41. PRO, MH68/218, minutes 7.9.1927 and 21.2.1928.

42. PRO, MH68/218, letter from Poplar Board of Guardians, 28.2.1928.

the epicentre of resistance to the Poor Law in England and talked of a sinister 'Poplar mind' which lurked behind every major industrial disturbance since the Great War.⁴³ This political fear, combined with worries about the financial stability of high-spending Unions like Poplar, encouraged the Ministry of Health to increase its control over local government during the 1920s.

One major weapon invented by the government in mid-1922 was the secret 'Q' list. This graded local authorities according to their financial situation and the greater the instability of the authority, the greater the reluctance of the Ministry of Health to authorise spending by the authority.⁴⁴ Because of its high rates, large overdraft and massive outstanding loans, Poplar made its first appearance on the list in October 1923,⁴⁵ and it remained listed throughout the decade; the result was continuous demands by the Ministry of Health that Poplar council limit its spending. The borough's Q-listing made all of its applications to the Unemployment Grants Committee require special Ministry of Health approval;⁴⁶ in 1923 the Ministry refused to sanction a loan for the purchase of four houses by the council to accomodate people temporarily displaced by a council housing scheme, and retracted its refusal the next year only when it realised that the larger scheme could not be completed without them;⁴⁷ the Ministry agreed to sanction the loan for a new municipal maternity and child welfare clinic in Bow only after the estimated costs had

43. PRO, MH57/94, 'Report on the Effect Upon the Poor Law System of the General Strike and Coal Dispute, 1926'; introduction (unpaginated).

44. for details of the 'Q' list, see S.V. Ward, 'Implementation versus Planmaking: The Example of List Q and the Depressed Areas 1922-39', Planning Perspectives, 1 (1986), 3-26.

45. PRO, HLG52/1344, list A, 30.10.1923.

46. PRO, HLG52/1344, minute, 4.12.1922.

47. PRO, HLG49/63 and HLG49/64, passim.

been reduced by a quarter;⁴⁸ and its place on the 'Q' list made the Ministry of Health exaggerate its praise of Poplar's health services in case recommendations for improvements encourage Poplar's spending further.⁴⁹

As well as the 'Q' list, there were specific pieces of legislation which hindered the implementation of Poplar Labour Party's plans. The 1927 Trade Union and Trade Disputes Act made Poplar's municipal closed shop, established in 1926, illegal.⁵⁰ The council's £4 minimum wage was declared illegal in by the House of Lords in 1925. In 1927 the Audit Act gave District Auditors much greater discretion in deciding what expenditure was permissible by councils, and decreed that councillors surcharged more than £500 were banned from office for five years.⁵¹

Especially restraining was the Guardians (Default) Act of 1926, which gave the Ministry of Health the power to replace locally-elected Guardians with government-appointed officials if a Board refused to comply with government demands. This act 'for the coercion of Poplar' had been considered as early as 1922,⁵² and coerce Poplar it did. Precisely the same commitment to local democracy which in the early 1920s had legitimated Poplar councillors' and Guardians' defiance of the Ministry of Health now forced them to moderate their policies; they preferred to remain in office and do what little they could rather than be replaced by non-elected civil servants whom they were sure

48. PRO, MH52/191, letter from PMBC to the Ministry of Health, 2.10.1925.

49. PRO, MH66/371, draft letters from the Ministry of Health to PMBC.

50. for details of Poplar council's closed shop, see PRO, HLG51/68, report of a deputation from the Poplar branch of the Poor Law Officers' Union to the Ministry of Health, 18.3.1927.

51. for a discussion of the increasing powers of district auditors during the early 1920s, see W.A. Robson, The District Auditor: An Old Menace in a New Disguise (London, 1925).

52. PRO, MH79/305, letter from the Home Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, 30.10.1923.

would do no good at all.⁵³ Their relief policies altered in consequence. In February 1926, a single adult out of work in Poplar received 12s.6d. plus their rent every week and the first 10s. of any other income was ignored; by April 1927 all other household income was taken into account, and the adult would receive 12s. plus their rent to a maximum of 5s.⁵⁴ The New Survey calculated the average weekly Poplar rent to be 9.4s. in 1929,⁵⁵ so the changed rules could make a significant difference to a weekly household budget. Table 9 showed the way numbers in receipt of relief fell sharply towards the end of the decade, and Poplar's Board of Guardians spent £532,000 on relief in the financial year 1926-27 and £421,000 in 1928-29, a cut of 20.9 per cent.⁵⁶ In 1927 they also began for the first time to prosecute those falsely claiming relief, something they had never done before.⁵⁷

The combination of the belief of Poplar Labour Party in constitutional change and elected representation, the prominence of reformist councillors and officers, and an increasingly powerful central state meant that Poplar council's policies became more and more moderate as the decade wore on. The council defied central government less and less, and local people were thus increasingly subject to central state control. The relationship between the civil society of Poplar and its local state was becoming much less close as the council, committed to good citizenship, bowed to the demands of the central state.

53. THLHL, Poplar Labour Party handbill, 1926 council elections.

54. PRO, MH68/218, minute of relief levels in Poplar Union, undated (April 1927?).

55. New Survey, III, p.367.

56. PMBC, Abstract of Accounts for the Year Ending March 30th 1930 (Poplar, 1930), p.168.

57. PRO, MH68/218, minute 28.4.1927.

Neighbourliness

Chapter IV argued that the radicalism of Poplar Labour Party was closely associated with the ethic of mutuality and solidarity which underlay Poplar's neighbourhood life; the idea that if someone was in need they should be helped by a neighbour was central to Poplar Labour Party's vision of poor relief freely available to all without penalty. This same ethic of help among friends, relations and neighbours had by the end of the 1920s turned into a form of petty corruption and elitism. This will be described before some explanations are suggested.

Almost all of Poplar's Labour councillors and Guardians were typical of Poplar people in their social and geographical backgrounds, as chapter IV noted; but by virtue of their election they were also very different from the average borough inhabitant: they had more power. This ambiguous position encouraged a tension in their relations with voters, a tension between participation and paternalism, which is clearest in the case of George Lansbury because he had more power than most. For if in Lansbury's typicality he remained very close to ordinary people, if he preferred to live in Bow where he was directly accountable to local residents for his actions,⁵⁸ and if he made this commitment the basis of his faith in participatory politics, his position in the 1920s as an editor of a national daily newspaper, and previously as the owner of a timber factory, also made him a man apart by giving him more power than other Poplar people had. Naturally he wanted to use this power for good, so he gave jobs in his sawmills and offices to those he knew needed work badly.⁵⁹ This was a 'personal and almost paternal' kindness,⁶⁰ a kindness to individuals he knew but an act which did nothing to encourage mass action or wider societal reform and in an important sense was a substitute

58. J.B. Groser, Politics and Persons (London, 1949), p.22.

59. One of those he helped was Labour councillor Albert Easteal; interview by the author with Mrs Sumner, 2.6.1987. See also R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London, 1951), p.45.

60. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, p.153.

for these latter desirables. In a similar way, other councillors and Guardians helped friends and relations to find council jobs and housing, and thus did neighbourhood generosity and familial bonds lead to corruption and nepotism. Sons and husbands of councillors were found jobs in the council Electricity Department especially.⁶¹ In 1928 a Communist sacked by Poplar Guardians for eating meals in the workhouse at the Guardians' expense retaliated with accusations of political victimisation and jobbery by the Poplar Board.⁶² And between 1926 and the mid-1930s the only way to find a council job was to become a member of the Knights of St Columba, a Catholic version of the Freemasons run by Labour councillor Hubbart.⁶³

The conviviality of Poplar's neighbourhoods was also politically ambiguous, supporting both the integration of the Party into the interstices of everyday life in the borough examined in chapter IV, and a growing separation of the Party from it. For among themselves, Party activists formed a distinct and sociable group (or groups, given the emergence of the snobby elite described above). They drank together after committee meetings, they were close friends, their sons and daughters intermarried and families helped to run political organisations: the Barkers and the PWLG for example, and the Lansburys were also involved in many local political activities.⁶⁴ All this created 'a lovely feeling of compactness' among the councillors and their associates; 'you understood things together'.⁶⁵ This is hardly reprehensible in itself, but it did encourage a tendency towards Poplar Labour Party becoming a closed and undemocratic clique, sharing perhaps too many assumptions and resentful of outside criticism. Charlie Sumner for

61. interview with Mr Barker.

62. East London Advertiser, 30.6.1928.

63. interview with Mr Barker.

64. This information comes from interviews with the children of councillors Sumner and Eastel, and of PWLG secretary Maude Barker; interviews by the author with Mr and Mrs Sumner and Mr Barker.

65. interview with Mrs Sumner.

example 'never in any circumstances deserted [a] pal',⁶⁶ a trait personally kind but suggesting that his loyalty could overcome his political principles. Certainly Poplar Labour Party made no concessions to the criticisms of the ILP and WSF, and by the 1930s 'the Labour Party bandwagon was the easiest to jump on',⁶⁷ a phrase suggesting a distinct lack of self-criticism.

This petty corruption and social enclosure of Poplar Labour Party was a far cry from its early ideal of local government open to all, and it must be seen in part as a result of the decline in the Party's radicalism just described. But another cause was the fact that such corruption did not lead to the alienation of the Party from its voters; Poplar Labour Party paid no electoral price for its elitism and corruption. Why not? The answer lies in two aspects of neighbourhood life.

The acceptance by local people of personal bonds and networks as a means of organising social life extended into political life too. Poplar people were used to such networks of friendship and mutual aid and they responded to their corrupt local state by finding their own strings to pull; one man interviewed complained that the Electricity Department refused to employ him 'even though' his mother was a Labour Party activist!⁶⁸ But the reason for the Labour Party's lack of electoral liability lies partly too in another aspect of Poplar's neighbourhood ethic which was explored in some detail in chapter IV: its creation of political loyalty to individuals rather than to political creeds. Poplar's politicians won office not on the basis of detailed political manifestoes but because they were known locally and personally; hence their politics could change and people would still vote for them. This absence

66. G. Lansbury, My Life (London, 1928), p.162.

67. interview with Overland in Richman, Ely a Flag for Poplar, p.93.

68. interview with Mr Barker. Joe Barkers's mother was the secretary of the Poplar Women's Labour Guild. Another interviewee remarked that finding jobs through friends and relations was common practice in the East End, and that nepotism and favouritism should be seen in that light; interview by the author with Mr Maillard, 16.6.1987.

of a steady benchmark of political theory among Poplar people extended to their Labour Party too. There was a decided anti-intellectualist streak in Poplar Labour Party; Lansbury in particular preferred to learn through experience rather than from books.⁶⁹ The Party's hostility to theory probably originated in a critique of the Fabian love of the 'expert' and of Toynbee Hall's dabbling in poverty and social reform,⁷⁰ but a blanket condemnation of political theory per se left Poplar Labour Party and their voters floating without a rudder in a sea of changing political circumstances, unable to gauge their right-ward drift.

Thus the neighbourhood ethic of Poplar encouraged petty corruption and the development of the Labour Party into an undemocratic clique, and the lack of socialist theory in both party and electorate made these changes less noticeable than they were to more theoretically-aware groups like the ILP and WSP.

Religion

Finally, a brief mention of the way in which the religious convictions of Poplar Labour Party failed to sustain the Party's initial radicalism. Its Christianity merely gave Poplar Labour Party some 'simple Christian moorings';⁷¹ it could do no more since, as chapter V pointed out, the political implications of the gospels were by no means obvious and many clergy denied that they contained any politics at all. Religion then offered no clear guidelines for political action; like the communal sensibility of the neighbourhood, it could not give Poplar Labour Party a sense of its own politics.

Once the left-wing impetus to an open and democratic relationship between civil society and the state had declined in Poplar, and once the grip of the central state tightened on local government, then the politics of Poplar

69. GLP, vol 10, letter from Ben Tillett, 21.2.1932.

70. Lansbury, My Life, p.130.

71. Groser, Politics and Persons, p.27.

Labour Party began to change. The activists' sense of themselves as a deprived class, their reformism, their lack of a clear political theory and the guaranteed loyalty of an electorate uninterested in detailed policies all encouraged the shift to a more distant and coercive relationship between Poplar's Labour council and local people and organisations. Yet the elements of this later autocracy were as closely connected to Poplar's knowledges and communal sensibilities as was the earlier democracy. The Party's definition of class, its constitutionalism, its religion and its atheoreticism are all aspects of the culture explored in the previous four chapters. Local politics cannot be understood outside its cultural context, but the relationship between a local culture and local politics must be seen as contingent, dependent on historical circumstance; as chapter I insisted, cultural traits do not determine political action.

The constructed relation between politics and culture

This contingent relationship between culture and local politics has implications for the understanding of local political support. If the culture of local activists did not determine their political commitments, nor can their culture somehow force ordinary people to vote in a particular way. Poplar Labour Party therefore had to work hard to win local support.

This point is supported by two observations made in section I above. First, it was noted that certain aspects of Poplar's culture were neither widely shared nor imbricated in the mass of everyday life in Poplar and, second, the contradictions between elements of Poplar's culture were remarked upon. Taking these two points together, it can be seen that parts of Poplar Labour Party's politics were in conflict with the widespread values of the locality's communal sensibilities. Its class rhetoric, for example, did not tally with the lack of support among Poplar workers for the unofficial shop stewards' movement of 1919-20; its internationalism co-existed with the royalism and patriotism of the mass of

Poplar people; its overt Christianity conflicted with the widespread apathy towards the churches in the borough; even its belief in the right of people to state benefits if they could not support themselves found some resistance in the pride of local people, and reluctance to accept relief continued throughout the decade.⁷²

These contradictions between the communal sensibilities of Poplar people and the restricted knowledges of Poplar Labour Party suggest that the Party had to make an effort to win local support, and this is the sense in which the relationship between the Party and local people was constructed. Chapters II and IV described many of the Party's methods. It held public meetings and publicised its ideas as often as possible, and it reminded people of the material benefits to Labour rule and of the local character of Labour candidates, this latter ploy stressing those sensibilities which voters and Party had in common. Poplar Labour Party built its local support using specific techniques.

Thus the relationship between Poplar's culture and Poplar Labour Party's politics was much less inevitable than structural accounts would have it, and the Party had to construct a constituency of support. It did so not only through offering material benefits to voters, but through speaking their language and putting their deepest beliefs about how society should operate -- the moral idea of neighbourhood -- into political action.

72. Such reluctance is evident in the many interviews in Richman, and in those of the author. Mr Franklin for example described those who accepted relief as 'the real hard cases'; interview by the author with Mr Franklin, 22.6.1987. As a Mr French remarked when asked by Richman if people were more willing to accept relief once Labour ran the Board of Guardians, 'to insititute a system is different from carrying it out. There were officials who were harsh'; interview with Mr French in Richman, Ely a Flag for Poplar, pp.105-08 (p.105).

III Place, localism and locality

The theoretical conclusions concerning politics and culture are now laid bare. It remains to consider the third element in the title of the thesis: locality.

As the first chapter pointed out, locality is a confused concept in the current spate of locality studies. Its original structural formulations were several: labour markets according to Urry, class practices according to Cooke, travel to work areas according to Savage.⁷³ Clearly these definitions are not wholly compatible with each other, each leading to different mappings of localities on the ground. Unhappy with this empirical confusion and also searching for ways in which place itself can be theorised as having causal powers, more recent work in the locality studies genre is beginning to see such structural accounts as inherently unsatisfactory. Duncan has explicitly begun to argue for an understanding of locality which defines a locality on the basis of whether a meaningful place exists in the minds of people, referring to localities as 'imagined communities', the imagining of which is a social process with material consequences.⁷⁴ This was the idea of locality advanced in the first chapter; to argue that localities exist only if people perceive them to is entirely in harmony with the interpretive ontology adopted by the thesis as a whole.

This section will relate locality as a conscious sense of place to the localism of Poplar Labour Party and other institutions of Poplar's civil society. These two terms--localism and locality -- require more discussion, and the last sub-sections will do that. But first, the sense in

73. J. Urry, 'Localities, Regions and Social Class', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 5 (1981), 455-74; P. Cooke, 'Class Practices as Regional Markers: A Contribution to Labour Geography', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.213-41; M. Savage, The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston 188-1940 (Cambridge, 1987), p.40.

74. S.S. Duncan, What is Locality?, Urban and Regional Working Paper 51, (University of Sussex, 1986), p.32.

which the thesis initially conceived Poplar as a place will be clarified.

Place

For the most part, Poplar as a place has been treated in this study as the geographical intersection of various cultural awarenesses. To return to the discarded metaphor of a layered cake, each layer representing a communal sensibility or restricted knowledge, Poplar was a slice through the cake, its borough boundaries being strokes of the knife, a site of cultural interactions which created the local knowledge of Poplar Labour Party.

Conceived in this way, Poplar's boundaries appear quite arbitrary to the arguments of the thesis. Yet through the course of the investigation, it has become obvious that in some sense Poplar as a distinct area has theoretical significance beyond being the simple limits of research interest; chapter IV discussed the strength of local patriotism. A sense of belonging to Poplar was one aspect of its culture, and it seems that borough boundaries were meaningful and important to Poplar people and politicians. In other words, Poplar the place was also Poplar a locality. To explore this further and to attempt an explanation in terms of the social and political character of the place, the localism of Poplar's civil society will be discussed first.

Localism

Localism means the prioritising of local needs and demands over the needs of outsiders. But since 'needs' are not always obvious and are often complex, they require conscious formulation, and localism also involves the prioritising of local perceptions of need over the perceptions of outsiders. Implicit in localism then is a general rejection of outside organisations, outside opinions and outside control. Localism both elevates the local and damns the non-local. Localism so defined can be seen as the conceptual bridge between place as a site of

intersecting cultural sensibilities, and locality as a self-conscious and meaningful identity. This is because localism is created by the interaction of various sensibilities and knowledges in a place; it is a result of certain cultural assumptions. Inherent in a localism, however, must be a definition of a locality. To rate local needs above non-local involved a definition of what exactly the local is; it requires a locality. This sub-section is concerned to explore the cultural roots of localism in more detail; the next sub-section will look at how the borough boundaries came to be defined as the local of Poplar's localism and why.

Localism was not unique to Poplar of course; MacIntyre has detected it in the 'little Moscows' he studied, and humanist geographers have argued that a sense of belonging to a place is a natural part of human behaviour and may underlie the kind of aggressive localism which was found in Poplar.⁷⁵ Laying this wider and possibly universal loyalty to place to one side, what were the causes of localism specific to Poplar?

Its first source was the justification for localism in the ILP ideas about local democracy so important to Poplar Labour Party. The Party's belief that local voting citizens imposed an inescapable mandate on their local Party to fulfill its promises to them was explored at length in chapter III, and it was argued that the commitment to local democracy strengthened the Party's resolve not to be dictated to by the Ministry of Health. The Party argued that local needs were primary because (at least in the early 1920s) the Party's raison d'être was seen as resting on its local representativeness. This prioritisation of the local was further reinforced by the Party's class rhetoric for, as Lansbury said, only the working class lived in Poplar, and thus local needs were also advocated by the Party as part of its class politics.

Another restricted knowledge contributed towards Poplar's localism: the rhetoric of localism employed by the

75. S. MacIntyre, 'Little Moscows': Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain (London, 1980), pp.176-84; E. Relph, Place and Placelessness (London, 1976).

PBMA. Its localism was not as vehement as Poplar Labour Party's of course; remember that in order to stop Poplar's Labour council continually increasing the rates it was prepared to see local government run by nominees of the central state. Nonetheless, it had a sense of the importance of the local, seeing a local community as a means of overcoming the divisions of class, as chapter III discussed.

As well as these restricted political knowledges, an element of the communal sensibility of neighbourhood was also a source of localism: the suspicion of strangers which all Poplar people shared. Newcomers to a neighbourhood were treated with some circumspection, and, as chapter IV explained, the mutuality of the neighbourhood was to a large degree limited to social life within each neighbourhood; residents of one group of streets saw those of another as strangers and even, as a quoted interviewee remembered, as fair game for theft. The leader of the Dockland Settlement in Poplar, Kennedy-Cox, believed that this distrust of outsiders extended not only to distant inhabitants of the borough, but also to any sort of outsider, including foreigners. In his explanation of why Poplar people rejected political extremes, he said:

The working man will often listen to an extremist street orator ... sometimes ... a point or two, in his oration, strikes the worker as having an element of truth in it, he even remembers the points and talks them over later with his mates; but eventually -- in the majority of cases -- the flamboyant or alien quality of the speaker mitigates considerably against the weight of his argument, so both he and his policy are summarily dismissed as 'potty' or 'up the pole'. I think that the average working man would prefer to be represented by an intelligent fellow working man of his own race and blood.⁷⁶

This dislike of the 'alien' in Poplar was not based on racism (at least not wholly so), for chapter IV noted that ethnic minorities in Poplar were generally accepted as neighbours and there were no ethnic ghettos in the borough. It is perhaps better interpreted as a lack of respect for all strangers and for their views, and the

76. R. Kennedy-Cox, Through the Dock Gates (London, 1939), pp.247-48.

reasoning behind this resentment at outsiders telling Poplar people what to do or what to think was exposed in an incident involving George Lansbury. In 1923, Lansbury criticised the leader of the UWO, a Swede called Soderberg, as inadequate because he was foreign, but not simply for being foreign; Lansbury argued that his foreignness meant he had not lived in Poplar long enough to know the people or their situation.⁷⁷ Outsiders, the argument went, were ignorant of Poplar and as a result could not understand it, lead it or prescribe for it adequately.

This localism was found in many of the institutions of Poplar's civil society. The stevedores' refusal to join the vast TGWU mentioned in chapter II, the AEU members' statement after the 1925 House of Lords ruling that 'they would not allow any outside body to come in and determine their wages, the Council being their employers',⁷⁸ the uninterest in denominational loyalty among churchgoers and their allegiance to individual priests described in chapter V, all can be seen in terms of a rejection of outside authority, outsiders' needs and of the control of outsiders.

The sources of Poplar's localism, its rejection of outside control and expertise, can be traced to its communal sensibility of neighbourhood and to its various restricted knowledges of citizenship then. But a problem of scale remains. The discussion of citizenship in chapter III argued that Poplar was significant to Poplar Labour Party and to the PBMA simply because it was the area which elected them. But how did the suspicion of strangers in a neighbourhood or of outsiders in a trade union branch or chapel turn into a borough-based patriotism? The next subsection explores how Poplar borough became a meaningful locality to the mass of its inhabitants.

77. Workers' Dreadnought, 6.10.1923.

78. Amalgamated Engineering Union, Monthly Journal, June 1925, p.40.

Locality

The political nature of Poplar Labour Party and the PBMA meant that for them Poplar was simply equivalent to the metropolitan borough in the elections of which they competed. The question to be answered is the way in which Poplar became real to the mass of people, many of whom saw Bow as far distant from the Isle of Dogs, as chapter IV noted. The most spectacular example of Poplar's localism was the Poplarism episode of 1921. This sub-section argues that this political event defined Poplar as a self-conscious locality because it made Poplar's borough boundaries significant through their delineation of the area whose councillors went to gaol in 1921.

Poplarism gave Poplar borough its meaning to local inhabitants and to outsiders. Itself encouraged by the localism of Poplar Labour Party, Poplarism gave the borough a self-conscious identity which survives in the memories of people who lived in the borough during the inter-war years especially. All the interviews undertaken for this study elicited descriptions (often inaccurate!) of what Poplarism was, and the accounts were without exception approving.⁷⁹ Poplarism also gave Poplar its identity to outsiders, as a hotbed of Bolshevik revolution; hence that civil servant's paranoia about 'the Poplar mind' which the previous section mentioned. Poplarism defined Poplar in the minds of people; it made Poplar a locality.

In this way it can be seen that the borough boundaries of Poplar were significant markers and are valid limits to this study. Not only do they map the administrative area of Poplar, they are also markers of an emotional area, an 'imagined community', for Poplar defined itself in terms of its local politics, a politics delimited precisely by those boundaries. Poplar Labour Party defended its politics in terms of Poplar as a place, as chapter I noted, and in turn those politics gave Poplar its identity.

The act which did most to define Poplar, Poplarism, was itself constructed from elements of Poplar's culture, and

79. see also the introduction to B. Keefe, Better Times (London, 1985), unpaginated.

after 1921 Poplar Labour Party became part of Poplar's way of life. In creating Poplar's identity, Labour became part of Poplar's character. So closely defined was it with the borough and its people, not only in its localism of course but in all the ways which this thesis has enumerated, that support for the Party became part of living in Poplar. 'The Labour Party didn't have to struggle, they didn't have to do anything because everybody thought they were Labour', a man recalling 1920s Poplar said to me.⁸⁰ 'Voting Labour was natural', said another Poplar interviewee, 'people like myself are born socialist or like that, I mean I would never change'.⁸¹ Even when the policies which had won its initial support faded and the Party became less radical, even when voices were raised in criticism against the Party, Poplar remained loyal to Labour; in the 1928 council elections, Communist candidates won a mere 12 per cent of the votes in the two wards they stood in, compared to the Labour Party's 77 per cent.⁸²

Support for Labour came to seem natural and inevitable, not only to people who lived in Poplar but apparently to some theorists of working-class politics too. The next section outlines the differences between their accounts and this thesis, and assesses the flaws in the latter.

Looking backwards -- and forwards

This final section considers whether any theoretical progress has been made by the thesis beyond the current orthodox understanding of place and politics presented in chapter I, and what work still needs to be done. It begins on a note of caution by discussing certain unresolved difficulties.

80. interview Mr Franklin.

81. interview with Mr Barker.

82. Percentages were calculated from the election results given in the East London Advertiser, 7.4.1928. Communist candidates did less well in the 1928 Guardian elections, winning 4.5 per cent of the vote compared to the Labour Party's 79.1 per cent; East London Advertiser, 7.4.1928.

Problems

The first chapter outlined the limits of investigation in the thesis, and in particular decided more or less to ignore the royalism and patriotism of the East End. Given the subsequent discovery of the constitutionalism of Poplar Labour Party, this was perhaps a mistake; the Party's reformism might have been related to the love of royalty and respect for the ruling monarch endemic to east London. Beyond this substantive point however problems remain in the thesis, problems of evidence and explanation.

The first, which is unresolvable, is that of the sources available for the study of Poplar in the 1920s. Any local study depends on the vagaries of history to provide its sources. Although key episodes did support the conclusions drawn, in chapter II in particular arguments were built on less evidence than desirable. This question of evidence is critical because the explanations offered in the thesis depend for their credibility not only on the coherence and the integrity of the narrative, but on its detail. However, other chapters did not lack evidence to the same extent, and the detailed portrait they painted of Poplar helped to overcome the gaps of evidence in that second chapter. They revealed the fine-grained context of Poplar's culture and enabled a thick description of its politics, enabled an explanation of the locality's radicalism in terms of a convincing presentation of its milieu and the local Labour Party's immersion in that milieu.

Another potential difficulty in the thesis concerns its presentation of that immersion. On occasion, its use of evidence may have seemed selective, making contradictory points; for example, Muriel Lester's radical citizenship which rejected the state has been argued to have had little impact on Poplar Labour Party while it was suggested that her pacifism was central to it. This problem of selectivity is more apparent than real however. It must be remembered that the object of explanation is a political party, a group of individuals who could choose from a (limited) repertoire of discourses and who did so for

various reasons: political expediency, political conviction, personal preference. The Party was not the passive result of an accumulation of influences but a group of politicians out, as the thesis has been at some pains to show, to win political power. Contextual explanation of such social movements will almost certainly always involve loose ends, unintended consequences, question marks and quirks, partial influences and contradictory choices; these are in the nature of such organisations. They do not make explanation impossible though; to return to the example of Muriel Lester, the importance of Christian socialism to Poplar Labour Party would account for its acceptance of her religious pacifism and also its rejection -- through its socialist commitment to state welfare provision -- of her anti-statism.

A second problem in the thesis is of a higher order but also concerns explanation: explanation not of Poplar Labour Party but of culture itself. What created Poplar's culture, and especially its communal sensibilities? This is a question neither the thesis nor its inspiration, Geertz, has confronted, and have never claimed to confront. This lacuna needs some justification however, and the rest of this section attempts just that. It suggests that, although explanation of Poplar's politics through culture is possible, explaining culture itself involves a fundamentally different ontological position from that adopted in the thesis; hence the question of what causes a culture is not an issue tackled by Geertz or by this study.

As the first chapter pointed out, Geertz has been criticised for his uninterest in the determination of culture.⁸³ There is of course the large literature of cultural studies which tackles this question of causality, but it was felt that this literature had several quite fundamental flaws which the ideas of Geertz, for all their

83. see for example M. Harris, Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture (New York, 1979).

neglect of the sources of a culture, did not.⁸⁴ These flaws will now be outlined.

Firstly, the geography of culture is ignored by most writers in the cultural studies school; with a very few exceptions they tend to recover popular culture or political allegiance in terms of an essence which permeates all social practices everywhere. The idea that all working-class people are socialist given the chance was rejected in chapter I. The similar idea that all working-class people share the same cultural values is equally false; yet it is especially prominent in the work of the fathers of cultural studies, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. Williams concluded his magisterial account of culture and society with the assertion that collectivism was and is the true worldview of the proletariat; similarly, Thompson's history of the social and industrial unrest in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was concerned to resurrect an authentic and popular radical tradition which defined all free-born Englishmen (sic).⁸⁵ Even the more recent 'turn to Gramsci' offers a single, if negotiated, ruling hegemonic culture, if the interpretation of Bennett is to be believed.⁸⁶ The omission of geography is serious. The theoretical relationship between geography and culture is by no means a simple one if the decade of attempts by geographers to insert space into social theory is anything to go by, and will need detailed and sustained theorisation. Geertz in contrast insists from the very beginning on the

84. 'Cultural studies' refers to the Gramscian theorists associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and with the Open University's popular culture course.

85. see the accounts of Williams and Thompson in Hall, 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms', in Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader, edited by T. Bennett and others (London, 1981), pp.19-37, and in T. Bennett, 'The Politics of "the Popular" and Popular Culture', in Popular Culture and Social Relations, edited by T. Bennett, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott (Milton Keynes, 1986), pp.6-21.

86. T. Bennett, 'Introduction: Popular Culture and "the Turn to Gramsci"', in Popular Culture and Social Relations, edited by Bennett, Mercer and Woollacott, pp.xi-xix.

geographical boundedness of cultures and the need for translation between them, and following him the thesis has been concerned to show the importance of locally grounded culture to political action.

Cultural studies also contain a certain class-based structuralism. This statement requires some amplification. 'Class' must be defined and the sense in which invocations of it are here argued to be structuralist clarified. Class is usually conceptualised in a fairly narrow sense by cultural studies theorists as the relationship to the means of production. This formulation of class as the relationship to the means of production is part of the explanation of culture offered by cultural studies. Yet although the simple economic determinism of the classic Marxist base-superstructure model has been replaced in all cultural studies by the idea that the elements of the 'superstructure', including culture, are relatively autonomous from the economic base and possess their own causal efficacy, this argument has sparked continual debate over the precise extent to which culture is autonomous from the economic base. Both Abercrombie and Hindess have found the formulation of 'relative autonomy' wanting.⁸⁷ Both argue that the notion of 'relative autonomy' is a semantic evasion of a quite crucial theoretical flaw in cultural studies theory. Either the cultural is autonomous or it is not, they say, but cultural studies cannot have it both ways. Hindess insists that 'there is no general mechanism of connection between the economic relations of a [particular] society, the relations between classes and whatever objective interests may be ascribed to them, and the formation of arenas of struggle in that [particular] society, the organisation of forces engaged in them and the

87. N. Abercrombie, Class Structure and Knowledge: Problems in the Sociology of Knowledge (Oxford, 1980); B. Hindess, Parliamentary Democracy and Socialist Politics (London, 1983). For a brief response, see S. Hall, 'Popular Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of "Taking Democracy Seriously"', in Marxism and Democracy, edited by A. Hunt (London, 1980), p.183.

issues and ideologies on which they divide'.⁸⁸ Their comments seem to me to be convincing; relative autonomy certainly gives fundamental causal power to the economy and class, and as will shortly be argued, this leads to severe difficulties with cultural studies.

Of course some cultural theorists, notably E.P. Thompson, have argued that people's experience mediates between the economy and class structure. This formulation is clearly much closer to the ideas of Geertz, although Thompson is little interested in the precise (and, Geertz would argue, cultural) mechanisms which give experience its form of social action. Indeed, Thompson's vague use of the category of experience led many cultural studies writers to return to more rigorous and structural understandings of class.

What is meant here by structuralism then? Bennett, introducing a collection of state-of-the-art cultural studies essays, notes that 'antagonistic class relations form the ultimately determining horizon within which cultural and ideological analysis must be located'.⁸⁹ Cultural studies, no matter how they define class (and the variations are not that many) are convinced that class is the most important category in explaining the forms of culture. This structuralism of method is the second reason for the hesitation in adopting their theoretical perspective here. Their stress on the primary importance of class underestimates the existence of other and equally powerful forms of oppression: patriarchy, for example.⁹⁰ This thesis has discovered political debate in all manner of unexpected locations: churches, social work centres, charities. In so doing it has revealed the central importance to Poplar's politics of social relations apart

88. Hindess, Parliamentary Democracy and Socialist Politics, p.41.

89. Bennett, 'Introduction: Popular Culture and "the Turn to Gramsci"', p.xiv.

90. for a critique of this class theoreticism in the earlier cultural studies, see A. McRobbie, 'Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique', in Culture, Ideology and Social Process, edited by Bennett and others, pp.111-24.

from class, and of other politics apart from those with a class base, which confirm the inadequacies in the cultural studies paradigm just outlined. The arguments of cultural studies for class and the economy as the causal base is a form of structuralism (although, as the critique of locality studies in the first chapter implied, class analysis and structuralism are not necessarily equivalent); causality is ultimately attributed to one abstract entity. This structuralism means that the omission of gender and race from cultural studies cannot be rectified by simply adding a few extra terms to discussions -- tacking on 'and gender and race' after mentions of class. The author feels strongly that patriarchy and racism are distinctive forms of oppression and cannot be understood using the same theoretical language as class. To acknowledge their causal power involves denying the primacy of class in cultural studies.

This critique of cultural studies still leaves the mechanisms by which culture is socially distributed and the ways in which it can empower and repress uncertain. But this does not mean that the thesis is uninterested in issues of power and control, far from it; it simply refuses to accept the structuralism implicit in the claim that class (defined either as an abstract relationship to, or as a lived experience of, the means of production) is always the root of culture. So too it would deny that patriarchy, for example, is always and everywhere the fundamental form of oppression. This refusal to generalise is grounded not in the need for structural analyses to be time- and place-specific; cultural studies themselves insist on the need for historical specificity. It is rooted in the prioritisation of people's self-definition of themselves and their politics, which this thesis has tried to interpret and represent. This strategy rejects on ontological grounds the possibility of structural methods of interpreting social action. Individuals and groups can and do bring their own understandings of their positions to their social and political actions and it is the retrieval of those understandings which explains social and political movements.

This dislocation between structural theory and people's accounts of their lives is clear in White's study of the 'worst street in north London' between the wars.⁹¹ In that study, the voices of the inhabitants of Campbell Bunk never quite mesh with the theoretical analysis of their class position which White brings to bear. That brings this discussion to the division between structure and agency which human geography has tried to bridge for so long. It seems to me to be an uncrossable divide, based as it is in two opposing theories of knowledge: structuralism and humanism. This thesis, in full awareness of the problems involved, without denying the presence of material constraints and conditions (see the discussion of the political impact of Poplar council's Poor Law policy in chapter IV) and with a commitment to exploring issues of power and conflict, chooses the humanist path. It asserts the importance of the complexity of social action and the need to root that complexity in material, social but especially cultural resources and restraints.

This thesis cannot therefore pretend to be the ultimate theoretical statement on locality, politics and culture. Despite this, it will now be suggested that it explains more about local politics than is possible within the approach of the locality-studies.

Progress

Locality-studies were criticised in the opening chapter for their structuralism and class theoreticism which severely limited human agency, ignored the complex processes of politicisation and underplayed all politics except those based on class.

It was found that the attempt here to explain Poplar's politics necessarily involved continuous discussion of individual activists, of the precise ways in which the politics of Poplar Labour Party were given shape through the local culture and won local support, and of the politics of citizenship, religion and gender. These three

91. J. White, The Worst Street in North London: Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars (London, 1986).

issues of agency, politicisation and the diversity of politics are fundamental to the full comprehension of the politics of Poplar or of any other locality, and their neglect by locality-studies can thus be criticised not only on the theoretical and ethical grounds outlined in chapter I, but in the light of the empirical enquiries in chapters II to V too. Poplar's political complexion was much more complicated than structural and class-based formulations can admit.

But the complexity of Poplar's politics is not the only aspect which locality-studies fail to comprehend adequately; the historical development and geographical uniqueness of Poplar are beyond their scope too. As Chapter II argued, class-structural accounts like that of Duncan and Goodwin cannot specify why only Poplar council went to gaol in 1921 because the social and economic structure of Poplar was very similar to that of the rest of working-class riverside London. Only an acknowledgement of local culture, especially its religiosity, can explain the geography of Poplar's resistance to the Poor Law in 1921. Poplar's Christianity, which was not an abstract entity but was a way of understanding the world imbued at Sunday schools and in churches by charismatic socialist priests, gave a moral edge and fervour to its politics lacking elsewhere. Similarly, structural analyses of politics find it hard to explain why radicalism declines when class or labour market structure remains the same,⁹² whereas the emphasis placed in this study and especially in this chapter on the contingent relation between culture and politics permits a change in politics to occur even when the local culture which shapes it remains unchanged.

However, the first chapter noted that more recent locality-studies are leaving the somewhat crude formulations of Cooke and Duncan and Goodwin and others behind and the thesis has explored two aspects of this revision in particular: culture itself of course and the notion of 'imagined communities'. The discussion of 'imagined communities' by Duncan is an especially

92. Savage makes this point in relation to the work of Cooke; M. Savage, personal communication.

significant indication of the new interests and understandings generated by locality-studies, but it is a concept which sits somewhat uneasily in Duncan's Marxist oeuvre. The ontology of the imagined community concept--the attribution of causal power to a collective, imagined frame of awareness -- is much more compatible with the hermeneutics of this thesis, as the previous section argued, than with Duncan's class-structuralism. Yet Duncan's use of it suggests that the concerns of the thesis are also becoming the concerns of the highly influential 'new geography' of locality-studies. They are tentatively starting on the path which this study has pursued some distance, and hopefully the arguments found here can contribute to the further advance of the discipline in its consideration of three key concepts: locality, politics and culture.

APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This appendix amplifies three methodological points: the design of the research project, and in particular the focus on one locality only; its use of oral history; and the way in which its arguments and evidence have been organised under five cultural categories.

Research design

This thesis has examined just one locality in great detail. A difficulty with this strategy when making an argument concerning the centrality of a local culture to local politics, however, is the problem of ascertaining just how local Poplar's culture actually was. If Poplar's culture was in fact little different from other working-class places it would be impossible to argue that it was the source of Poplar's highly unusual radicalism. And there can be no doubt that forms of neighbourliness were common to all working-class localities and that the borough's socialism and radical citizenship, although rarer, were certainly not unique. How then can the claim that it was the nuances of specifically local communal sensibilities and restricted knowledges which fed Poplar Labour Party's exceptional radicalism be sustained?

The ideal answer would be to offer a comparative case study of another locality and explore the relationship between its culture and politics alongside that of Poplar. At the beginning of the research that indeed was the aim: to study two places in equal detail. However, a second case study would have involved at least eighteen months more work, and the current demand for the speedy completion of theses prevented such a protracted project. Given such pragmatic constraints, alternative means of judging Poplar's uniqueness had to be found. Secondary studies of other localities were turned to, and it was on the basis of

these that it seemed possible to argue that the one aspect of local culture which was apparently exclusive to Poplar was the combination of its Christianity and its socialism. This use of others' studies was clearly not the most satisfactory strategy, for none of those studies were interested in exploring local culture per se; all had other theoretical goals in mind. That they do not address the issue of culture means however that although a little evidence can be adduced to suggest that Poplar did have a local culture unique to itself, none can be brought forward to suggest that it did not. We must await further culture-oriented studies of other radical localities before such judgements can be passed with confidence.

Oral history

A further methodological point concerns the use of oral history in the thesis. There are two points to discuss: the interviews themselves and the use to which they were put in the thesis.

The interviews

Nine interviews were undertaken. Three interviewees replied to an advertisement placed in the council's free newspaper delivered to all households in Tower Hamlets (the borough in which Poplar now lies), asking for people willing to talk about their memories of Poplar in the 1920s. Three more were found because they had left their names and addresses with the Poplar Women's Labour Guild archive in the Labour Party Library and were prepared to help me. Of the remaining two, one was contacted at a National Museum of Labour History conference and the other through an oral history project of the Museum of London.

All these people, except Mr Stothard, were interviewed once, at their homes; Mr Stothard preferred to visit the author. All the interviews were taped and were very loosely structured, centering on the interviewee's home and work experiences in the 1920s. All interviewees were teenagers during that decade, and all but one came from

manual working-class backgrounds (Mr Franklin's mother owned a corner shop). Care was taken not to ask leading questions, and transcripts of interviews undertaken by others were used with caution.

Insights from the interviews

The interviews were initially carried out in order to provide information unavailable from archival sources, especially concerning neighbourhood life. In this sense they were seen as primarily descriptive. However, as the theoretical approach of the thesis was clarified, so too the helpfulness of the interviews increased; no longer simply illustrative of social relations and practices, they also helped to reveal underlying cultural sensibilities and to give the subjects of research a voice in its conclusions. This changed perspective emerged quite late in the research process however, and this, together with the author's lack of interviewing skills, prevented the repeated in-depth interviews which were its logical conclusion.

The five categories

Interpretation of Poplar's politics has been organised into five sections, each discussing a key communal sensibility or restricted knowledge felt to be fundamental to Poplar's Labour politics: neighbourliness, religion, gender, class and citizenship. This section clarifies why and how those five keywords in Poplar's political discourse were chosen.

Given the central importance it attached to culture, it seemed most appropriate to organise the thesis in categories given by the culture it studied. Since the aim was to explain Poplar's radical politics, the question was then which aspects of Poplar's culture shed most light on the nuances of its local Party's policies. After two years of study, certain 'sensibilities' (a theoretically loaded term of course) were emerging as crucial themes in the rhetoric of Poplar Labour Party and of Poplar's civil society more generally: a version of Christianity, a kind

of feminism, an exuberant taste for melodrama, a certain democratic ethos, a neighbourly socialism. An initial attempt was made to write an account of Poplar's politics in terms of four categories: class, neighbourliness, melodrama and religion. However, this structure ignored certain prominent themes of the Party's policies, in particular its feminism and interpretation of citizenship. The next attempts -- culminating in this thesis -- tackled melodrama as an aspect of Poplar's conviviality and neighbourliness, stressed gender more and gave the discourse of citizenship much greater consideration.

These changes were made in an effort to write a coherent narrative text, for the flow of the text was seen as a measure of its power to convince; as Clifford has remarked, 'the writing of cultural descriptions is properly experimental'.¹ This final version, to the author at least, has been much more successful than the first, because the categories reveal more of the subtleties of Poplar's politics and thus it has at least partially dissolved the opacity surrounding the actions of Poplar's councillors, making their actions meaningful by situating them in a rich, vibrant and sometimes contradictory context. By invoking that context in the way it does, the thesis attempts a 'thick description' of Poplar's politics in the '1920s, and tries to demonstrate 'the power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers'.²

1. J. Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, edited by J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (Berkeley, 1986), pp.1-26 (p.2).

2. C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York, 1973), p.16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography has seven sections:

- I manuscript sources
- II newspapers and journals
- III oral history interviews and transcripts
- IV primary published sources
- V secondary published sources
- VI unpublished theses and dissertations
- VII conference and seminar papers

Primary published sources are defined as all works published before 1945, and those published later but written by authors with first hand experience of the earlier period in the East End. Much material, especially the publications of local organisations, can be found in Tower Hamlets Local History Library.

I Manuscript sources

Poplar Metropolitan Borough Council records

- Libraries Committee, minutes of meetings (THLHL)
- Special Housing Committee, minutes of meetings (THLHL)
- Works Committee, minutes of meetings (THLHL)

Political parties' records

- Election handbills collection (THLHL)
- Labour Party Advisory Committee on Local Government, minutes of meetings and papers presented (Labour Party Library)
- London Labour Party archive, minutes of executive committee meetings and papers presented (GLRO)
- National Unemployed Workers' Movement archive, reports of national conferences and of decisions taken by the National Administrative Council (W. Hannington papers, Marx Memorial Library)
- Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance archive (THLHL)
- Poplar Women's Labour Guild archive (Labour Party Library)

Workers' Socialist Federation archive (E.S. Pankhurst papers, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam)

Trade union records

Council of Action archive (Labour Party Library)
 General Strike archive, local reports from Greater London
 (Trades Union Congress Library)

Employers' records

Bryant and May, correspondence and minutes of meetings of
 Fairfield Works Committee (Hackney Local History
 Library)
 R.H. Green and Silley Weir, Board minute book (National
 Maritime Museum)
 Port of London Authority, General Strike archive (Port of
 London Authority Library)

Charities

Bromley St Leonard's Ecclesiastical and Parochial
 Charities, notes of meetings and accounts (THLHL)
 King Edward's Hospital Fund, correspondence with Poplar
 Hospital for Accidents and Reports of the Visitors
 (GLRO)

Churches and other religious organisations

1. Church of England

Poplar Rural Deanery, minutes of meetings (THLHL)
 All Hallows' Bromley, Parochial Church Council, minutes of
 meetings (GLRO)
 ---- marriage registers 1919-29 (GLRO)
 St Matthias's Poplar, marriage registers (GLRO)
 ---- Clothing and Maternal Society Books (GLRO)
 St Stephen's Bow, marriage registers (GLRO)

2. Nonconformist churches

Harley Street Congregational Church, list of members
 (GLRO)
 ---- marriage register (GLRO)
 E.H.R. Rozzell, Concise History of Trinity Worship and Work
 (unpublished typescript, undated) (THLHL)

3. Roman Catholic Church

SS. Mary and Joseph Catholic church, marriage registers
(SS. Mary and Joseph Catholic Church Clergy House,
Pekin Street, London E14)

4. Other

Fellowship of Reconciliation, General Committee, minutes of
meetings (British Library of Political and Economic
Science)

Kingsley Hall, executive council, minutes of meetings
(Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, London E3)

Public Record Office, Kew

Files in classes CAB (Cabinet papers), FS (Registrar of
Friendly Societies), HLG (Ministry of Health), LAB
(Ministry of Labour) and MH (Ministry of Health)

Personal papers

C.K. Cullen (Communist Party Library)

W. Dick, manuscript diary (THLHL)

R.C.K. Ensor (Bodleian Library)

W. Hannington (Marx Memorial Library)

A.E. Hurren, unpublished handwritten autobiography (1967)
(THLHL)

G. Lansbury (British Library of Political and Economic
Science)

M. Lester, correspondence to the Borough Librarian (THLHL)

B. Meers, letter on retirement in March 1938 (THLHL)

W. Norman, unpublished typescript autobiography (1975)
(THLHL)

Miscellaneous

Biographical press cuttings collection (THLHL)

Poplarism press cuttings collection (THLHL)

New Survey of London Life and Labour, manuscript collection
and household card survey (British Library of Political
and Economic Science)

II Newspapers and journals

- Daily Herald (Newspaper Library, Colindale)
East End News (THLHL)
East End Pioneer (THLHL)
East London Advertiser (THLHL)
Evening News (Newspaper Library, Colindale)
Lansbury's Labour Weekly (THLHL)
Musical News and Herald (Newspaper Library, Colindale)
Workers' Dreadnought (THLHL)
- Amalgamated Engineering Union, Monthly Journal (British Library of Political and Economic Science)
Anglo-American Oil Company, Anglo-American Journal (Esso House, Victoria Street, London SW1)
Bryant and May Ltd, Brymay Magazine (Hackney Local History Library)
Commercial Gas Company, Co-Partnership Herald (THLHL)
Gas, Light and Coke Company, Co-Partners' Magazine (THLHL)
Great Eastern Railway, Great Eastern Railway Magazine
(British Library of Political and Economic Science)
Kingsley Hall, The Gleam (THLHL)
London, Midland and Scottish Railway, LMS Railway Magazine
(British Library of Economic and Political Science)
Ministry of Labour, Gazette (British Library of Political and Economic Science)
National Union of Railwaymen, Railway Review (British Library of Economic and Social Science)
Transport and General Workers' Union, Record (British Library of Economic and Political Science)
- East London Church Chronicle (THLHL)
Parish Magazines of All Hallows' Bromley, All Hallows' East India Dock Road, All Saints' Poplar, St Mary's Bow, St Matthias's Poplar, St Michael and All Angels Bromley, St Saviour's Poplar, St Stephen's Bow and St Stephen's Poplar (THLHL)

III Oral history transcript sources

- University of Essex, Department of Sociology, Family Life Oral History Project transcripts
- Island History Trust, 151 Manchester Road, London E14, oral history project transcripts
- Interview transcripts in G. Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar (London, 1975)
- Tower Hamlets Local History Library, transcripts of interviews by A.H. French with W.E. Clapham and M. Lester
- Summary of interview with Nellie Cressall by Prof. W. Fishman, 1965
- Nine interviews were conducted by the author. If the permission of the interviewees can be obtained, the tapes will be deposited in Tower Hamlets Local History Library.

IV Primary published sources

- A.M. Anderson, The Newer Developments in Industrial Welfare (London, 1921)
- Annual Charities Register and Digest 1924-25 (London, 1925)
- R.P. Arnot, The General Strike, May 1926: Its Origin and History (London, 1926)
- J.J. Astor and others, The Third Winter of Unemployment: The Report of an Enquiry Undertaken in the Autumn of 1922 (London, 1923)
- C.R. Attlee, The Social Worker (London, 1920)
- D.M. Bailey, Children of the Green: A True Story of Childhood in Bethnal Green 1922-37 (London, 1981)
- E. Baillie, Shabby Paradise: The Autobiography of a Decade (London, 1958)
- E.W. Bakke, The Unemployed Man: A Social Study (London, 1933)
- Baptist Union, The Baptist Handbook, 11 vols (London, 1919-29)
- A. Bennett, The Religious Interregnum (London, 1929)
- G. Benson, Socialism and the Teaching of Jesus (London, 1925)

- W.H. Beveridge, Unemployment: A Problem of Industry, second edition (London, 1930)
- G.C. Binyon, The Christian Socialist Movement in England: An Introduction to the Study of its History (London, 1931)
- J. Blake, Memories of Old Poplar (London, 1977)
- J. Bloomberg, Looking Back: A Docker's Life (London, 1979)
- C. Booth, Life and Labour in London. Series 3: Religious Influences, 7 vols (London, 1902-03)
- Borough of Poplar Chamber of Commerce, Handbook and Trade Directory of Members and Subscribers (Poplar, 1925)
- Annual Report 1925-26 (Poplar, 1926)
- B. Bosanquet, 'The Philosophy of Casework', Charity Organisation Review, 39 (1916), 117-33
- K. Brill, 'Parish Priest', in John Groser. East End Priest, edited by K. Brill (London, 1971), pp.74-96
- J.M.E. Brownlow, Women's Work in Local Government (England and Wales) (London, 1911)
- Bryant and May Ltd, Brymay Co-Partnership: Also Provident Schemes and Welfare Organisations (London, 1930)
- T. Burke, Limehouse Nights: Tales of Chinatown (London, 1917)
- T. Burke and P. Binder, The Real East End (London, 1932)
- E. Burns, The General Strike. May 1926: Trades Councils in Action (London, 1926)
- S.A. Burstall, Frances Mary Buss: An Educational Pioneer (London, 1938)
- C.V. Butler, Domestic Service: An Enquiry by the Women's Industrial Council (London, 1916)
- J.A.R. Cairns, Drab Street Glory (London, 1934)
- Census of England and Wales, 1921 and 1931
- Charity Organisation Society, Annual Report 1922-23 (London, 1924)
- W.E. Clapham, The Good Fight at Bow (London, 1938)
- Clarke, Nickolls and Coombs Ltd, The Proof of the Pudding: Being Some Notes on Co-Partnership and Profit-Sharing (London, 1919)
- J.J. Clarke, The Housing Problem: Its History. Growth. Legislation and Procedure (London, 1920)

- The Local Government of the United Kingdom, third edition (London, 1925)
- M. Cohen, I Was One of the Unemployed (London, 1945)
- G.D.H. Cole, Organised Labour: An Introduction to Trade Unionism (London, 1924)
- Communist Papers: Documents Selected From those Obtained on the Arrest of the Communist Leaders on the 14th and 21st of October 1925, cmd.2682 (PP 1926, vol XXIII)
- Communist Party of Great Britain, Manual of Party Training. Principles and Organisation (London, 1924)
- Congregational Union, Congregational Year Book, 11 vols (London, 1919-29)
- Crockford's Clerical Directory 1926 (London, 1927)
- Crockford Prefaces: The Editor Looks Back (London, 1947)
- W. Crooks, untitled essay in Christianity and the Working Classes, edited by G. Haw (London, 1906), pp.74-83
- J. Dash, Good Morning, Brothers! (London, 1969)
- J. Desormeaux, 'Poplar Days', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by K. Brill (London, 1971), pp.29-37
- S.P. Dobbs, The Clothing Workers of Great Britain (London, 1928)
- B. Drake, - Women in Trade Unions (London, 1920?)
- East London Nursing Society, Annual Report, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29)
- W.H. Fairbrother, The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, second edition (London, 1900)
- Fellowship of Reconciliation, The Fellowship of Reconciliation: Its Basis and Work (London, 1926)
- M. Fels, Joseph Fels: His Life and Work (London, 1920)
- H.J. Ferris, Girls' Clubs: Their Organisation and Management: A Manual for Workers (London, 1918)
- H. Finer, English Local Government (London, 1933)
- H.A.L. Fisher, The Common Weal (London, 1924)
- T.C. Garland, Snapshots of My Life-Work (London, 1910)
- Gazetteer of Trade Union Branches, Trades Councils, etc., in the United Kingdom, 3 vols (London, 1918)
- W. Goldman, East End My Cradle, second edition (London, 1947)
- H. Gosling, Up and Down Stream (London, 1927)
- C. Grant, Earthing Bundles (Bromley-by-Bow, 1930)

- From Me to We (40 Years on Bow Common) (Bromley-by-Bow, 1940)
- R. Graves and A. Hodge, The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-39 (London, 1940)
- T.H. Green, The Works, II (London, 1890)
- J.B. Groser, Politics and Persons (London, 1949)
- Does Socialism Need Religion? (London, 1951)
- W.H. Hadow, Citizenship (London, 1923)
- W. Hannington, Unemployed Struggles 1919-36: My Life and Struggles Amongst the Unemployed (London, 1936)
- J.K. Hardie, Can a Man be a Socialist on a Pound a Week?, third edition (London, 1905)
- The Common Good: An Essay on Local Government (Manchester, 1911?)
- G. Haw, From Workhouse to Westminster: The Life Story of Will Crooks M.P. (London, 1911)
- L. Heren, Growing Up Poor in London (London, 1973)
- R. Hobhouse, Mary Hughes: Her Life for the Dispossessed (London, 1949)
- O.M. Hueffer, Some of the English: A Study Towards a Study (London, 1930)
- A. Hutt, The Post-War History of the British Working Class 1918-37 (London, 1937)
- H.M. Hyndman, A Commune for London (London, 1887)
- L.P. Jacks, Constructive Citizenship (London, 1927)
- E. Jenks, An Outline of English Local Government, seventh edition (London, 1930)
- H. Jennings, The Private Citizen in Public Social Work: An Account of the Voluntary Children's Care Committee System in London (London, 1930)
- 'Voluntary Case-Work Societies', in Voluntary Social Services since 1918, edited by H.A. Mess (London, 1948), pp.55-68
- H. Jones, The Principles of Citizenship (London, 1919)
- E.T. Kelly and M.L. Haskins, Foundations of Industrial Welfare (London, 1927)
- R. Kennedy-Cox, An Autobiography (London, 1931)
- Through the Dock Gates (London, 1939)
- C.W. Key, Red Poplar: Six Years of Socialist Rule (London, 1925)

- Kingsley Hall, Annual Report, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29)
- Labour Party, Report of the Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Labour Party (London, 1918)
- E. Lansbury, George Lansbury, My Father (London, 1934)
- G. Lansbury, London for Labour (London, undated)
- Why I Joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (London, undated)
- untitled essay in G. Haw Christianity and the Working Classes, edited by G. Haw (London, 1906), pp.163-80
- The Development of the Humane Administration of the Poor Law under the Poplar Board of Guardians (Woolwich, 1907)
- These Things Shall Be (London, 1920)
- 'Poplar and the Labour Party: A Defence of Poplarism', Labour Monthly, 2 (1922), 383-91
- Jesus and Labour (London, 1924)
- My Life (London, 1928)
- Looking Backwards -- and Forwards (London, 1935)
- My England (London, 1934)
- 'Why Pacifists Should be Socialists', Fact, 7 (1937), 5-74
- E.C.P. Lascelles and S.S. Bullock, Dock Labour and Decasualisation (London, 1924)
- W.H. Lax, Lax of Poplar: The Story of a Wonderful Quarter of a Century (London, 1927)
- Let's Go To Poplar! (London, 1929)
- Adventure in Poplar (London, 1933)
- Lax, His Book: The Autobiography of Lax of Poplar (London, 1937)
- M. Lester, It Occurred to Me (London, 1937)
- Kill or Cure? (Nashville, 1937)
- M. Lester and A. Pullen, Shall I Pull My Weight? Christian Citizenship for Youth (London, 1936)
- London County Council, Census 1921: Report Upon the Statistics Relating to Greater London Contained In the Various Volumes of the Census of England and Wales, 1921 (London, 1928)
- London Statistics 9 vols (London, 1920-30)
- London School of Economic and Political Science, New Survey of London Life and Labour 9 vols (London, 1930-35)

- E. MacAdam, The Equipment of the Social Worker (London, 1925)
- J. MacCunn, Ethics of Citizenship, fourth edition (Glasgow, 1907)
- Ethics of Social Work (London, 1911)
- J.R. MacDonald, Socialism: Critical and Constructive, revised edition (London, 1924)
- G.P. McEntee, The Social Catholic Movement in Britain (New York, 1927)
- C. McKay, A Long Way From Home (New York, 1969)
- C.C. Martindale, Bernard Vaughan, S.J. (London, 1923)
- 'The Poplar Settlement', The Month, 155 (1930), 109-18
- Masonic Memorial Service, St Matthias's, 1 May 1919
(Poplar, 1919)
- H.A. Mess, Casual Labour at the Docks (London, 1916)
- J.H. Muirhead, The Service of the State: Four Lectures on the Political Teaching of T.H. Green (London, 1908)
- E.W. Mundy, Profit-Sharing and Co-Partnership: An Introduction, second edition (London, 1928)
- National Association of Boys' Clubs, Annual Report, 2 vols (London, 1929-31)
- National Union of Manufacturers, Descriptive and Classified Directory of Members (London, 1925)
- C. Noel, An Autobiography (London, 1945)
- North London Collegiate School, Bromley-by-Bow Fund Report, 8 vols (Poplar, 1920-27)
- Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine, Annual Report 1924-25 (London, 1925)
- R.B. Oram, The Dockers' Tragedy (London, 1970)
- E.M. Page, 'No Green Pastures I', East London Papers, 9 (1966), 27-40
- E.S. Pankhurst, Save the Mothers (London, 1930)
- The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the World War (London, 1932)
- L. Paul, Angry Young Man (London, 1951)
- D. Platt, 'Socialist Because Christian', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by K. Brill (London, 1971), pp.160-92
- H. Pollitt, Serving My Time: An Apprenticeship to Politics (London, 1940)

- H. Pollitt and F. Brockway, Which Way for the Workers?
(London, 1932)
- Poplar Association for Befriending Girls, Annual Report,
6 vols (Poplar, 1924-29)
- Poplar Benevolent and Accident Relief Society, Annual
Report, 6 vols (Poplar, 1923-29)
- Poplar Borough Municipal Alliance, The Breakdown of Local
Government in Poplar (Poplar, 1925)
- Poplar Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund, Annual
Report 1922 (Poplar, 1922)
- Poplar Freemasons' All Saints' Lodge, Order of Commem-
oration Service, All Saints' Church, October 2 1927
(Poplar, 1927)
- Poplar Great Fete Day Committee of Management, Fete
Programme (Poplar, 1916-20)
- Poplar Hospital for Accidents, Annual Report, 10 vols
(London, 1919-29)
- Poplar Metropolitan Borough Council, Annual Report on the
Sanitary Condition and Vital Statistics of the
Metropolitan Borough of Poplar by the Medical Officer
of Health, 11 vols (Poplar, 1919-29)
- List of Members, 5 vols (Poplar, 1919-29)
- Guilty and Proud of it: Poplar's Answer (Poplar, 1922)
- The Work of Six Years 1919-25 (Poplar, 1925)
- General Information and Hints for the Expectant Mother
and the Management of Infants (Poplar, 1927)
- Abstract of Accounts for Year Ended 31st March 1930
(Poplar, 1930)
- Poplar Tuberculosis Care Committee Fund, Annual Report 1932
(Poplar, 1932)
- Port of London Registration Committee, Registration of Port
Transport Workers in the Port of London (London, 1934)
- R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London, 1951)
- R.W. Postgate, E. Wilkinson and J.F. Horrabin, A Workers'
History of the Great Strike (London, 1927)
- A.L. Preston, The Parish Priest in his Parish (London,
1933)
- J.C. Pringle, Can London Climb Out of the Slough of
Despond? (London, 1927)

- E.D. Proud, Welfare Work: Employers' Experiments for Improving Working Conditions in Factories, third edition (London, 1918)
- W. Purcell, 'Birth of a Rebel', in John Groser, East End Priest, edited by K. Brill (London, 1971), pp.1-20
- Reconstruction Committee, Interim Report on Joint Standing Industrial Councils, cd.8606 (PP 1917-18, vol XVII)
- Report on Profit-Sharing and Labour Co-Partnership in the United Kingdom, cmd.544 (PP 1920, vol XXIII)
- M.D. Reed, Elizabeth Pepperell. 21 June 1914 to 24 May 1971 (London, 1973)
- G. Richman, Fly a Flag for Poplar (London, 1975)
- W.A. Robson, The District Auditor: An Old Menace in a New Disguise (London, 1925)
- St Michael and All Angels' Charity Entertainments Committee, Programme of a Grand Garden Fete in Aid of Miners' Wives and Children. July 21 and 22 1926 (Poplar, 1926)
- SS. Mary and Joseph Catholic Church, Programme of the Solemn Out-of-Door Procession in Honour of Our Lady of Ransom on Sunday July 22 1928 (Poplar, 1928)
- R. Samuel, Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding (London, 1981)
- D. Scannell, Mother Knew Best: An East End Childhood (London, 1974)
- J. Scurr, Labour and the Rates: A Policy for Labour Councillors (London, 1923)
- 'The Future of Socialism', Socialist Review, 24 (1924), 83-87
- A. Shadwell, The Problem of Dock Labour (London, 1920)
- D.H. Smith, Industries of Greater London (London, 1933)
- R. Strachey, The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (London, 1928)
- Thomas Brothers, What's Behind the Window? The Story of Your Daily Milk (Poplar, 1931)
- F. Thompson, Maintenance for Dockers -- NOW. Not in 1940. and a National Dock Programme (London, 1928)
- The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and International Seamen's Clubs (Hamburg, 1930?)
- W. Thorne, My Life's Battles (London, 1926)

- H. Thorogood, East of Aldgate (London, 1935)
- F. Tillyard, The Worker and the State: Wages, Hours, Safety and Health (London, 1923)
- H.M. Tomlinson, London River (London, 1921)
- A Mingled Yarn: Autobiographical Sketches (London, 1953)
- Toynbee Hall, Unemployment in East London: The Report of a Survey Made from Toynbee Hall (London, 1922)
- Transport Workers -- Court of Inquiry vol I. Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Inquiry, cmd.936 (PP 1920, vol XXIV)
- Trinity Congregational Church, untitled pamphlet (Poplar, 1952)
- L. Valentine, Two Sisters and the Cockney Kids (London, 1978)
- V. de Vesselitsky, The Homeworker and Her Outlook: A Descriptive Study of Tailoresses and Boxmakers (London, 1916)
- E.M. White, The Philosophy of Citizenship: An Introduction to Civics for Adults (London, 1921)
- Women's Co-operative Guild, Notes on Its History, Organisation and Work (London, 1920)
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Yearly Report, 13 vols (London, 1915-1929)
- Women's Presbyterian Settlement, Annual Report 1929 (Poplar, 1930)
- F.R. Worts, Citizenship: Its Meaning, Privileges and Duties (London, 1919)

V Secondary published sources

- N. Abercrombie, Class Structure and Knowledge: Problems in the Sociology of Knowledge (Oxford, 1980)
- J.A. Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society (London, 1987)
- 'Place Anyone?', Political Geography Quarterly, 6 (1987), 39-40
- R. Bailey and M. Brake, Radical Social Work (London, 1975)
- K. Bassett, 'Labour, Socialism and Local Democracy', in Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left

- Alternatives, edited by M. Boddy and C. Fudge (London, 1984), pp.82-108
- F. Bedarida, 'Urban Growth and Social Structure in Nineteenth-Century Poplar', London Journal, 1 (1975), 159-188
- C. Bell and H. Newby, Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of Community (London, 1971)
- J.M. Bellamy and J. Saville, Dictionary of Labour Biography vol 1- (London, 1972-)
- T. Bennett, 'Introduction: Popular Culture and "The Turn to Gramsci"', in Popular Culture and Social Relations, edited by T. Bennett, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott (Milton Keynes, 1986), pp.xi-xix
- 'The Politics of "the Popular" and Popular Culture', in Popular Culture and Social Relations, edited by T. Bennett, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott (Milton Keynes, 1986), pp.6-21
- P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (New York, 1966)
- D. Bertaux, Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences (London, 1981)
- W. Beveridge, Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance (London, 1948)
- A.H. Bird, Outreach: The Story of One Hundred Years of Christian Witness in London's East End (Old Ford, 1970)
- D.S. Birn, The League of Nations Union 1919-45 (Oxford, 1981)
- M. Blanch, 'Imperialism, Nationalism and Organized Youth', in Working Class Culture: Studies in Theory and Practice, edited by J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson (London, 1979), pp.103-20
- D. Blunkett, interviewed in Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives, edited by M. Boddy and C. Fudge (London, 1984), pp.242-60
- M. Boddy and C. Fudge (eds), Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives (London, 1984)
- J. Bornat, 'What About that Lass of Yours Being in the Union?': Textile Workers and their Union in Yorkshire 1888-1922', in Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's

- History and Women's Work, edited by L. Davidoff and B. Westover (London, 1986), pp.76-98
- S.R. Bowlby, J. Foord and L. McDowell, 'The Place of Gender in Locality Studies', Area, 18 (1986), 327-31
- N. Branson, Poplarism, 1919-1925: George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt (London, 1979)
- V. Brittain, The Rebel Passion: A Short History of Some Pioneer Peace-Makers (London, 1964)
- F. Brockway, Bermondsey Story: The Life of Alfred Salter (London, 1949)
- N.H. Buck, 'The Analysis of State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Cities: The Case of Municipal Labour Policy in East London 1886-1914', in Urbanisation and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society, edited by M. Dear and A.J. Scott (London, 1981), pp.501-34
- A. Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Volume One, Trade Union Leader 1881-1940 (London, 1960)
- J. Bush, Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-19 (London, 1984)
- G. Bussey and M. Tims, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915-65: A Record of Fifty Years Work (London, 1965)
- A. Buttimer and D. Seamon (eds), The Human Experience of Space and Place (London, 1980)
- D. Byrne, 'Class and the Local State', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 61-82
- C. Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism During the Industrial Revolution (Oxford, 1982)
- T. Carrigan, B. Connell and J. Lee, 'Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', Theory and Society, 14 (1985), 551-604
- M. Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain 1914-45: The Defining of a Faith (Oxford, 1980)
- N.K. Choo, The Chinese in London (London, 1968)
- 'Citizen Hurd', New Statesman, 15.4.1988, p.3
- 'Citizenship and the Tory Democracy', New Statesman, 27.4.1988, p.14
- J. Clarke, A. Cochrane and C. Smart, Ideologies of Welfare: From Dreams to Disillusion (London, 1987)

- H.A. Clegg, A History of British Trade Unions since 1889: Volume II 1911-33 (Oxford, 1985)
- J. Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, edited by J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (Berkeley, 1986), pp.1-26
- A. Clinton, The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain 1900-40 (Manchester, 1977)
- A. Cochrane, 'What a Difference the Place Makes: The New Structuralism of Locality', Antipode, 19 (1987), 354-63
- C. Cockburn, The Local State (London, 1977)
- 'The Material of Male Power', Feminist Review, 9 (1981), 41-58
- A.P. Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community (London, 1985)
- J.L. Cohen, Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory (Oxford, 1983)
- G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate, The Common People 1746-1946, second edition (London, 1946)
- D. Coleman and E. Hostettler, The Anglican Church on the Isle of Dogs (Isle of Dogs, 1984)
- W.E. Connolly, Appearance and Reality in Politics (Cambridge, 1981)
- P. Cooke, 'Class Interests, Regional Restructuring and State Formation in Wales', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 184-204
- Theories of Planning and Spatial Development (London, 1983)
- 'Class Practices as Regional Markers: A Contribution to Labour Geography', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.213-241
- 'The Changing Urban and Regional System in the United Kingdom', Regional Studies, 20 (1986), 243-51
- 'Clinical Inference and Geographic Theory', Antipode, 19 (1987), 69-78
- M.G. Coombes, A.E. Green and D.W. Owen, 'Substantive Issues in the Definition of "Localities": Evidence from the Sub-Group Local Labour Markets in the West Midlands', Regional Studies, 22 (1988), 303-18
- J. Cornwell, Hard-Earned Lives: Accounts of Health and Illness from East London (London, 1984)
- D. Cosgrove, 'Towards a Radical Cultural Geography: Problems of Theory', Antipode, 15 (1983), 1-11

- J. Cox, The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930 (London, 1982)
- J.E. Cronin, Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain (London, 1979)
- 'Coping with Labour 1918-26', in Social Conflict and the Political Order in Modern Britain, edited by J.E. Cronin and J. Schneer (London, 1982), pp.113-45
- R. Currie, Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism (London, 1968)
- R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700 (Oxford, 1977)
- S. Daniels, 'Landscaping for a Manufacturer: Humphrey Repton's Commission for Benjamin Gott at Arnley in 1809-10', Journal of Historical Geography, 7 (1981), 379-96
- I. Darlington, 'King Edward's Hospital Fund for London and its Records', Journal of the Society of Archivists, 2 (1964), 423-30
- A. Deacon and E. Briggs, 'Local Democracy and Central Policy: The Issue of Pauper Votes in the 1920s', Policy and Politics, 2 (1973), 347-64
- B. Donoghue and G.W. Jones, Herbert Morrison (London, 1973)
- R.E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 (London, 1966)
- S.S. Duncan, What is Locality?, Urban and Regional Studies Working Paper 51 (University of Sussex, 1986)
- S.S. Duncan and M. Goodwin, 'The Local State and Restructuring Social Relations: Theory and Practice', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 6 (1982), 157-86
- S.S. Duncan, M. Goodwin and S. Halford, 'Policy Variation in Local States: Uneven Development and Local Social Relations', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 12 (1988), 107-28
- L. Farmer, The Bow Story (London, 1965)
- 'A Flawed Vision', New Statesman, 27.4.1988, p.3
- J. Franklyn, The Cockney: A Survey of London Life and Language (London, 1953)

- J. Gaffin and D. Thoms, Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild (Manchester, 1983)
- C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System' in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, edited by M. Banton (London, 1966), pp.1-46
- The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York, 1973)
- Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology (New York, 1983)
- A. Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration (Cambridge, 1984)
- A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (London, 1976)
- R. Grant, 'Interviews and Archives: A Comment on Oral History and Fieldwork Practice', Geography, 72 (1987), 27-35
- D. Gregory, 'The Discourse of the Past: Phenomenology, Structuralism and Historical Geography', Journal of Historical Geography, 4 (1978), 161-73
- D. Gregory and D. Ley, 'Culture's Geographies', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 6 (1988), 115-16
- N. Gregson, 'The CURS Initiative: Some Further Comments', Antipode, 19 (1987), 364-70
- L. Guelke, Historical Understanding in Geography (Cambridge, 1982)
- J. Gyford, Local Politics in Britain, second edition (London, 1984)
- The Politics of Local Socialism (London, 1985)
- S. Hall, 'Popular Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of "Taking Democracy Seriously"', in Marxism and Democracy, edited by A. Hunt (London, 1980), pp.157-85
- 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms', in Cultural Ideology and Social Process: A Reader, edited by T. Bennett and others (London, 1981), pp.19-37
- S. Hall and B. Schwarz, 'State and Society 188-1930', in Crises in the British State 1880-1930, edited by M. Langan and B. Schwarz (London, 1985), pp.7-32

- G. Hardwicke, Keepers of the Door: The History of the Port of London Authority Police (London, 1980)
- K. Harris, Attlee (London, 1982)
- M. Harris, Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture (New York, 1979)
- D. Harvey, Social Justice and the City (London, 1973)
- D. Harvey and others, 'Reconsidering Social Theory: A Debate', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 5 (1987), 367-434
- J. Hearn, The Gender of Oppression: Men, Masculinity and the Critique of Marxism (Brighton, 1987)
- D.M. Hill, Democratic Theory and Local Government (London, 1974)
- S. Hill, The Dockers: Class and Tradition in London (London, 1976)
- B. Hindess, Parliamentary Democracy and Socialist Politics (London, 1983)
- J. Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement (London, 1973)
- Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974 (Brighton, 1983)
- E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London, 1984)
- K. Hoggart and E. Kofman, 'Introduction', in Politics, Geography and Social Stratification, edited by K. Hoggart and E. Kofman (London, 1986), pp.1-15
- E. Hostettler, 'A Dockland Community -- The Isle of Dogs', in Dockland: An Illustrated Historical Survey of Life and Work in east London, edited by R.J.M. Carr (London, 1986), pp.59-70
- C.T. Husbands, 'East End Racism 1900-80: Geographical Continuities in Vigilantist and Right-Wing Political Behaviour', London Journal, 8 (1982), 3-26
- K.S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England (London, 1963)
- J.A. Jackson, 'The Irish in East London', East London Papers, 6 (1963), 105-19
- P. Jackson, 'A Plea for Cultural Geography', Area, 12 (1980), 110-13
- 'The Rediscovery of Space', Progress in Human Geography, 10 (1986), 118-24

- J.B. Jefferys, The Story of the Engineers 1800-1945 (London, 1945)
- R.J. Johnston, The Geography of English Politics: The 1983 General Election (London, 1985)
- 'Local Government and the State', in Progress in Political Geography, edited by M. Pacione (London, 1985), pp.152-76
- 'The Neighbourhood Effect Revisited: A Spatial Science or Political Regionalism', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 4 (1986), 41-55
- G.S. Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History 1832-1982 (Cambridge, 1983)
- Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Late-Victorian England, second edition (Harmondsworth, 1984)
- G.W. Jones, 'Herbert Morrison and Poplarism', Public Law, 18 (1973), 11-31
- H. Jones, 'Employers' Welfare Schemes and Industrial Relations in Inter-War Britain', Business History, 15 (1983), 61-75
- P.d'A. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England (New Jersey, 1968)
- J. Keane, Democracy and Civil Society (London, 1988)
- B. Keefe, Better Times (London, 1985)
- B. Keith-Lucas, 'Poplarism', Public Law, 7 (1982), 52-80
- W. Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921: The Origins of British Communism (London, 1969)
- B. Kosmin, 'Political Identity in Battersea', in Living in South London: Perspectives on Battersea 1871-1981, edited by S. Wallman (London, 1982), pp.17-51
- S. Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics (London, 1975)
- Lancaster Regionalism Group (ed), Localities, Class and Gender, (London, 1985)
- S. Lash and J. Urry, 'The New Marxism of Collective Action: A Critical Analysis', Sociology, 18 (1984), 33-50
- R. Lee, 'Uneven Zenith: Towards a Geography of the High

- Period of Municipal Medicine in England and Wales', Journal of Historical Geography, 14 (1988), 260-80
- J. Lewis, 'Beyond Suffrage: English Feminism in the 1920s', Maryland Historian, 6 (1975), 1-17
- J. Lovell, Stevedores and Dockers: A Study of Trade Unionism in the Port of London 1870-1914 (London, 1969)
- 'The Irish and the London Dockers', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 35 (1977), 16-18
- M. McAuley, 'Political Culture and Communist Studies: One Step Forwards and Two Steps Back', in Political Culture and Communist Studies, edited by A. Brown (London, 1984), pp.13-39
- L. McDowell and D. Massey, 'A Woman's Place?', in Geography Matters!, edited by D. Massey and J. Allen (Cambridge, 1984), pp.128-47
- L.J. Macfarlane, 'Hands Off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920', Past and Present, 38 (1967), 126-52
- S. MacIntyre, 'Little Moscows': Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-War Britain (London, 1980)
- R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24 (London, 1974)
- H. McLeod, Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City (London, 1974)
- A. McRobbie, 'Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique', in Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader, edited by T. Bennett and others (London, 1981), pp.111-24
- J. Mark-Lawson, M. Savage and A. Warde, 'Gender and Local Politics: Struggles over Welfare Policies 1918-39', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group (London, 1985), pp.195-215
- T.H. Marshall, Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays (Cambridge, 1950)
- R. Martin, Communism and British Trade Unions 1924-33: A Study of the National Minority Movement (Oxford, 1969)
- D. Massey, 'In What Sense a Regional Problem?', Regional Studies, 13 (1979), 233-43

- Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production (London, 1984)
- S. Mews, 'The Churches', in The General Strike, by M. Morris (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp.318-37
- R. Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society (London, 1969)
- J.C. Mitchell, 'Case and Situation Analysis', Sociological Review, 31 (1983), 187-211
- M. Morris, The General Strike (Harmondsworth, 1976)
- C.L. Mowat, The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913: Its Ideas and Work (London, 1961)
- J.V. Newberry, 'Anti-War Suffragists', History, 62 (1977), 411-25
- H. Newby, 'Locality and Rurality: The Restructuring of Rural Social Relations', Regional Studies, 20 (1986), 209-15
- H. Newby and others (eds), Restructuring of Capital: Recession and Reorganisation in Industrial Society (London, 1985)
- M.M. Niven, Personnel Management 1913-63: The Growth of Personnel Management and the Development of the Institute (London, 1967)
- C. Offe and H. Wiesenenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organisational Form', Political Power and Social Theory, 1 (1980), 67-115
- M. Olson, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, second edition (New York, 1971)
- D. Owen, English Philanthropy 1660-1960 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964)
- R. Pahl, 'The Restructuring of Capital, the Local Political Economy and Household Work Strategies', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.242-64
- G. Parry (ed), Participation in Politics (Manchester, 1972)
- C. Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory (Cambridge, 1970)
- H. Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, fourth edition (London, 1987)
- H.W. Pfautz, Charles Booth on the City: Physical Pattern and Social Structure (London, 1967)

- G. Phillips and N. Whiteside, Casual Labour: The Unemployment Question in the Port Transport Industry 1880-1970 (Oxford, 1985)
- C. Pierson, 'New Theories of State and Civil Society: Recent Developments in Post-Marxist Thought and Analysis', Sociology, 18 (1984), 563-71
- D.C.D. Pocock (ed), Humanistic Geography and Literature (London, 1981)
- A. Pred, 'Structuration, Biography Formation and Knowledge: Observations of Port Growth in the Late Mercantile Period', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 2 (1984), 251-75
- R. Price, 'Rethinking Labour History: The Importance of Work', in Social Conflict and the Political Order in Britain, edited by J.E. Cronin and J. Schneer (London, 1982), pp.179-214
- F. Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England (Oxford, 1980)
- J. Redman, The Communist Party and the Labour Left 1925-29 (Hull, 1957)
- G. Rees, 'Coalfield Culture and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 4 (1986), 469-76
- G. Rees and others (eds), Political Action and Social Identity: Class, Locality and Ideology (London, 1985)
- E. Relph, Place and Placelessness (London, 1976)
- R. Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (Manchester, 1971)
- P.W. Romero, Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical (London, 1987)
- M. Rose, The East End of London (London, 1951)
- E. Ross, '"Fierce Questions and Taunts": Married Life in Working-Class London 1870-1914', Feminist Studies, 8 (1982), 575-60
- 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War One', History Workshop Journal, 15 (1983), 4-27
- '"Not the Sort That Would Sit on the Doorstep": Respectability in Pre-World War I London Neighbour-

- hoods', International Labour and Working-Class History, 27 (1985), 39-59
- P. Ryan, 'Poplarism 1894-1930', in The Origins of British Social Policy, edited by P. Thane (London, 1978), pp.56-83
- R. Samuel, 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor', in The Irish in the Victorian City, edited by R. Swift and S. Gilley (London, 1985), pp.267-300
- P. Saunders, 'Rethinking Local Politics', in Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives, edited by M. Boddy and C. Fudge (London, 1984), pp.22-48
- M. Savage, 'Capitalist and Patriarchal Relations at Work: Preston's Cotton Weaving 1890-1940', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group (London, 1985), pp.177-94
- The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1949 (Cambridge, 1987)
- 'Understanding Political Alignments in Contemporary Britain: Do Localities Matter?', Political Geography Quarterly, 6 (1987), 53-76
- Cultures of Difference, forthcoming Open University course unit
- M. Savage and others, '"Locality Research": The Sussex Programme on Economic Restructuring, Social Change and the Locality', Quarterly Journal of Social Affairs, 3 (1987), 27-51
- A. Sayer, 'Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation', Radical Philosophy, 28 (1981), 6-15
- 'Industry and Space: A Sympathetic Critique of Radical Research', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 3 (1985), 3-29
- A. Sayer and K. Morgan, 'A Modern Industry in a Declining Region: Links Between Method, Theory and Policy', in Politics and Method: Contrasting Studies in Industrial Geography, edited by D. Massey and R. Meegan (London, 1985), pp.147-68
- D.I. Scargill, 'Space, Place and Region: Towards a Transformed Regional Geography', Geography, 70 (1985), 138-41

- J. Seabrook, The Idea of Neighbourhood: What Local Politics Should Be About (London, 1984)
- P. Seed, The Expansion of Social Work in Britain (London, 1973)
- P. Shankman, 'The Thick and the Thin: On the Interpretive Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz', Current Anthropology, 25 (1984), 261-79
- D. Shapiro, 'Explaining Peripheral Change', in Localities. Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group (London, 1985), pp.77-95
- L.J. Sharpe and K. Newton, Does Politics Matter? The Determination of Public Policy (Oxford, 1984)
- E. Shils, 'Charisma, Order and Status', American Sociological Review, 30 (1965), 199-213
- J. Silk, 'Beyond Geography and Literature', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 2 (1984), 151-78
- M.J. Smith, Professional Education for Social Work in Britain: An Historical Account (London, 1965)
- N. Smith, 'Dangers of the Empirical Turn: Some Comments on the CURS Initiative', Antipode, 19 (1987), 59-68
- H. Southall, 'Towards a Geography of Unionization: The Spatial Organization and Distribution of Early British Trade Unions', Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, forthcoming 1988
- J. Springhall, Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements 1883-1940 (London, 1977)
- M. Stacey and M. Price, Women, Power and Politics (London, 1981)
- D. Stone, Municipal Socialism 1880-1982: An Introduction and Bibliography, Urban and Regional Studies Working Paper 44, (University of Sussex, 1985)
- D. Sutton, 'Liberalism, State Collectivism and the Social Relations of Citizenship', in Crises in the British State 1880-1930, edited by M. Langan and B. Schwarz (London, 1985), pp.63-79
- M. Swenarton, Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain (London, 1981)
- P. Thane, Foundations of the Welfare State (London, 1982)

- P. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914 (London, 1967)
- The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford, 1978)
- N. Thrift, 'Flies and Germs: A Geography of Knowledge', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.368-403
- N. Thrift and P. Williams (eds), Class and Space: The Making of Urban Society (London, 1987)
- B.S. Turner, Citizenship and Capitalism: The Debate over Reformism (London, 1986)
- J. Urry, The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society and the State (London, 1981)
- 'Localities, Regions and Social Class', International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 5 (1981), 455-74
- 'Social Relations, Space and Time', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.20-48
- 'Locality Research: The Case of Lancaster', Regional Studies, 20 (1986), 233-42
- M. Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920 (London, 1985)
- A. Vincent and R. Plant, Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists (Oxford, 1984)
- R.G. Walters, 'Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians', Social Research, 47 (1980), 537-56
- S.R. Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen 1918-20', Historical Journal, 16 (1973), 179-88
- S.V. Ward, 'Implementation versus Planmaking: The Example of List Q and the Depressed Areas', Planning Perspectives, 1 (1986), 3-26
- A. Warde, 'Comparable Localities: Some Problems of Method', in Localities, Class and Gender, edited by the Lancaster Regionalism Group (London, 1985), pp.54-76
- 'Spatial Change, Politics and the Division of Labour', in Social Relations and Spatial Structures, edited by D. Gregory and J. Urry (London, 1985), pp.190-212

- 'Space, Class and Voting in Britain', in Politics, Geography and Social Stratification, edited by K. Hoggart and E. Kofman (London, 1986), pp.33-61
- R.F. Wearmouth, The Political and Social Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century (London, 1957)
- K. Weller, Don't Be a Soldier! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-18 (London, 1985)
- J. White, The Worst Street in North London: Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars (London, 1986)
- N. Whiteside, 'Welfare Insurance and Casual Labour: A Study of Administrative Intervention in Industrial Employment 1906-26', Economic History Review, 32 (1979), 507-22
- R. Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, second edition (London, 1983)
- Towards 2000 (London, 1983)
- A. Wiltsher, Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the First World War (London, 1985)
- K. Woodroffe, From Charity to Social Work in England and the United States (London, 1962)
- G. Wootton, The Official History of the British Legion (London, 1956)
- C. Wrigley, 'Introduction', in A History of Industrial Relations: Volume II, 1914-39, edited by C. Wrigley (Brighton, 1987), pp. 1-22
- S. Yeo, Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis (London, 1976)
- 'Working-Class Association, Private Capital, Welfare and the State in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Social Work, Welfare and the State, edited by N. Parry, M. Rustin and C. Satyamurti (London, 1979), pp.48-71

VI Unpublished theses and dissertations

- T.J. Cole, 'Life and Labour in the Isle of Dogs: The Origins and Evolution of an East London Working-Class Community 1800-1980', (Ph.D dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1984)
- J.A. Gillespie, 'Economic and Political Change in the East

End of London During the 1920s', (Ph.D dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1984)

L. Jones, 'Sylvia Pankhurst and the Workers' Socialist Federation: The Red Twilight 1918-24', (M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1972)

J.S. Rowett, 'The Labour Party and Local Government: Theory and Practice in the Inter-War Years', (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1979)

VII Seminar and conference papers

F. Driver, 'The Uses of History in Contemporary Human Geography', paper presented at the annual conference of the Institute of British Geographers, University of Loughborough, January 1988

G.S. Jones, 'Invention and Tradition: The Case of the Cockney 1780-1980', paper presented at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, February 1987

P. Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots in First World War London', paper presented at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, February 1988

G. Rees, H. Williamson and V. Winckler, 'Employers' Recruitment/Training Strategies and Local Economic Restructuring: The Case of the South Wales Coalfield', paper presented at the sixth 'Urban Change and Conflict' conference, University of Kent at Canterbury, September 1987

