

Evaluate the
development of social
policy in the area of
housing



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Housing is the crucial issue, as it directly affects us all in one way or another. Housing is a key component to the quality of life. Because of the importance of housing in everyday life, it is permanent source of social and political concern. This essay will attempt to evaluate the development of social policy in the area of housing. The source will be the impact of the industrial revolution, where squalor, overcrowding, inadequate housing and town planning had catastrophic affects on health and social problems during that period.

The Liberal reforms at the turn of the century will then be examined, assessing the impact that the change in attitudes towards state intervention and the reasons behind it had on housing policy. housing was one of the central elements in the welfare state that Sir William Beveridge had envisaged. The effect of the subsequent Beveridge Report, combined with the affect of the second World War, and the following transformation that took place in the area of housing and housing policy will be analysed as will the circumstances and developments from then through to the 1970's.

The enormous changes that have taken place in housing since 1979, due to the influence of the ' New Rights' approach to government policy making, and the impact the mass state withdrawal from mainstream housing provision will be investigated Finally the needs and aspirations for the current government to consider will be discussed. The Industrial Revolution, which took place in Britain between 1750 and 1840, was a time of massive social upheaval and rapid social change. Britain developed into the first great industrial society in the world.

This completely reformed manual labour which, up until then had been agricultural based. The rate at which the industrialisation took place brought with it appalling social consequences for the labouring classes as well as an enormous environmental transformation of the country. Landowners had been removed from the land by the 1845 Enclosures Act. With no means of support they and their families were forced to descend on the growing cities and sell their labour to the factory owners in order to survive.

This was the birth of the working classes in Britain. The greatest impact was on parts of the country which had supplies of iron and coal needed for the steam engine. New towns sprang up in South Wales, the West Midlands, Lancashire and Yorkshire. [Class handout] The Trade and Craft centres grew into cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Coventry and Sheffield. In 1750 only two cities in Britain had populations over 50, 000.

In 1850 there were 29. Nearly one person in three lived in a city with more than 50, 000 inhabitants. Class handout] This rapid urbanisation meant that houses were built quickly and often poorly. They were usually built in close proximity to factories and work places. This in turn led to pollution problems, which caused many health issues. Overcrowding was a massive problem as well as the slum housing. Poor health, poverty, crime and terrible working conditions were all common place during this period. Due to the absence of any form of state provision, private landlords provided the great majority of housing.

According to Hobsbawn the Industrial Revolution in Britain was “ Not merely an acceleration of economic growth, but an acceleration of growth because

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of and through economic and social transformation” [Couch 1990 p6] This was true, because during the second half of the eighteenth century and this first forty years of the nineteenth century, the British economy experienced a rapid acceleration in investment in plant and machinery and also a massive expenditure on urban infrastructure like factories, housing, transportation and utility net works.

The construction process employed about 17, 000 workers by 1800 and by 1841 the industry employed around 4. 7% of the workforce and housing output alone had risen to 8. 2% and house building in particular achieved greater productivity than the industrial average (Couch 1990 p7). The growth in industrial and commercial activity led to increased urbanisation as a result of in-migration towards cities in search of work.

Prior to 1750 population growth and movement was slight, House building activity was at a very low level and mainly confined to replacement of existing stock, the pace then increased during the following three decades, and was rapid in the last twenty years of the century increasing to around 24, 000 dwellings a year by the turn of the century. Frederick Engels the son of a factory owner, after witnessing the awful conditions that workers endured in Manchester felt compelled to record them in his book ‘ The Conditions of the Working Class in England’.

In it on the subject of their living conditions he writes ‘ The cottages are old, dirty and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts, and in parts without drains and pavements; masses of refuse, awful and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions. ‘ (Class handout) He also

mentions the homeless, how people with no roof slept on the streets while row upon row of houses stood empty. In 1842 Edwin Chadwick also felt it necessary to speak out on the appalling living conditions throughout the country he produced a report on ' The Sanitary Condition of the Labour Population of Great Britain.

The report revealed overcrowding, poor ventilation, inadequate refuse disposal and bad water as major causes of disease at that time (Class handout). In 1843 Robert Peel's government appointed a Royal Commission to check the facts of Chadwick's report. Despite the introduction of legislation concerned with improving living and working conditions particularly in the dockland areas of London were not hard to find. (Class handout). The coming of the railway also had a great impact the displacement of people for railway improvement was often seen on a large scale.

It was relatively easy to secure eviction 1275 people in 255 cottages made way for Manchester Central Station this was a similar story in Liverpool, Glasgow, Newcastle and other cities (Couch 1990 p12). These displaced population pushed up the demand for accommodation elsewhere in the city, while some new building took place, for the majority the effect was simply to increase overcrowding. Apart from involvement in railway building there had been little state involvement or concern with Housing.

The failure of the state to react to the appalling, deteriorating condition of the housing stock and working class living conditions were down to a number of reasons. Undoubtedly one of the most important was the low level or

working class incomes, and their lack of bargaining power which led to an inability to purchase any better housing conditions other reasons all concern inadequacies within the structure of the state low levels of knowledge about the nature of the housing problem.

It was not until the late 1840's that the causes of cholera, typhoid began to be understood and the importance of clean water, sanitation and building ventilation fully appreciated. The dominant economic philosophy of minimum state intervention also made the government reluctant to impose regulations so what landlords chose to do with their property tended to be regarded as his business. The power of the working class was also very limited at this time in the early part of the century they had little political power, no vote and little industrial muscle due to the absence of trade unions, few could read or write or afford legal action.

It was the establishment of the early housing societies and trusts, such as the Peabody Trust (1862) and the improved Industrial Dwellings company (1863) which was instrumental in bringing the slum housing problem to public attention. 1848 had seen legislation in the shape of the 1848 Public Health Act but that was predominantly concerned with new buildings. 1860 did seem to be the time of real civic concern with the condition of buildings and housing particularly in working class areas.

In Liverpool for example, the city council began to build new tenement blocks St Martin's Collages in the Everton district was their first venture. The first national legislation concerned with the removal of slum housing came with Torrens (1868) and Cross (1875) Act. These acts were designed to

permit local authorities to clear streets of slum properties and build replacement housing. Such proposals were controversial at the time and during its passage through parliament the clause providing for replacement buildings dropped.

Clearance alone, without rebuilding, would lead to a worsening of living conditions; was a fact appreciated by many authorities who took the view that an unfit dwelling was better than no dwelling at all, so many Medical Officers of Health were reluctant to declare properties unsanitary. The Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Improvement Act 1875 (The Cross Act) saw the dealing with slums on a dwelling by dwelling basis.

This Act also went some way towards recognising that rehousing was a public responsibility, street planning, paving, sewerage and the granting or leasing of land to persons who would build upon it were some of its features. But the ineffectiveness of legislation and absence of subsidy meant that by 1884 only nine towns in the Country had made any improvements (Couch 1990 p16). In spite of the importance of these Acts as legislative landmarks the scale of their impact on housing renewal and urban change was limited.

Urban renewal activity up to World War One was only marginally influenced by state intervention. It was between 1880 and 1890 that the Liberals began to discuss the need for greater state intervention and more social reform. J A Hobson and L T Hobhouse were both instrumental in these reforms. Social surveys by men such as Booth and Rowntree also played their part by demonstrating that most poverty was not caused by deficiencies in an individual's character, as some Liberals had once argued. (Class handout)

1889 to 1902 during recruitment of soldiers for the Boar War that people in power realised just how poor the health of many male working class really was reinforced by the empirical studies by Booth and Rowntree which showed that one third of the recruits were malnourished, concerns then began being raised about the economic affects this would have, an unhealthy workforce could not compete in the world workplace. Three fifths of enlisting soldiers in Manchester were declared unfit for service combined with the early defeats in the Boar War.

These facts had enormous impact the questions were being asked ' Just how great is Britain? ' Sidney Webb stated that a national minimum standard of life was essential to national efficiency and imperial strength, and Beatrice Webb gave the reason for the change in political ideas on state intervention as the ' class consciousness of sin' among men of intellect and property, as they realised that the growth of British economy had failed to produce a decent livelihood and tolerable conditions for a majority of the inhabitants of Great Britain (Hay 1983 p33).

Asquith also made a similar point when asking ' what is the use of talking about Empire if here, as its very centre, there is always to be found a mass of people, stunted in education, a prey of intemperance huddled and congested beyond the possibility of realising in any true sense either social or domestic life? ' (Hay 1983 p31). The political pressure from the working class themselves was great at this time and was one of the strongest reasons for the origins of social reform. The working class who had created wealth, wanted to see some of it.

The extension of the franchise, growth of trade unions and growing competition from other countries all pushed the cause for social reforms onwards. Slum clearance and housing improvement ceased with the outbreak of World War 1. Four years of virtual inactivity in house building left the country in 1915 with an acute housing shortage, estimated at around 600, 000 (Fraser 1973 p167). It was Lloyd George who committed himself and his party to remedying this problem with his euphoric promise to provide homes fit for heroes.

The problem that faced the post-war country was that the massive inflation caused by the war in effect priced those most needy out of the housing market and rent controls, introduced in 1915 meant that working class house-building costs and a rent which those in need could afford (Fraser 1973 p168). Housing had been under discussion in the later stages of the war, but effective planning was undermined by the delays in creating the Ministry of Health. It was not until July 1919 that the time was found to deal with the housing shortage.

A series of Housing Acts was orchestrated the first being Addison's Act (The Housing and Town Planning Act) this was the origins of council housing then; followed by the 1923 Chamberlain Act and the 1924 Wheatley Act. These were all in their different ways intended to stimulate new housing supply (Couch 1990 p16), The State had begun to exhibit some direct commitment to housing as a social policy based upon local initiative and central supervision, compulsion and subsidy (Fraser, 1973 p168), and this, unlike the nineteenth century sanitary measures, was largely the result of working class pressure for reform.

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The Addison Act was short lived, the achievement never matched the ambition the problem being that although the need for new housing was great and a central planned in Lloyd George's social reform policies, the shortage of skilled men and materials combined with the high price of land, and grossly inflated interest rates had a big impact on the cost of implementing the programme.

Addison became a scapegoat for Lloyd George's failed social programme and was dismissed from the Government in 1921 with his housing policy terminated (Fraser 1973, p 168). However a total of 213, 000 homes were built under Addison's Scheme and an overall total of 110, 000 housed were completed, the largest number built with state subsidy in any inter-war year (Fraser 1973, p168).

Homelessness was widespread during the 1920's and 1930's any many of these were hidden homeless (They did not show up on Government statistics), like the child victims of homelessness many people were victims of the war, who because of their situation felt denied of dignity and home comforts, turned to squatting and pushed for the right for empty properties to be turned over to the government to be allocated to the homeless 50, 000 people also took occupation of disused army camps (Forbidden Britain: our secret past 1900-60 Homelessness.

First Broadcast BBC2 1994). Irish immigrants, Teenage runaways and migratory workers all made up the numbers of the homeless during this period. Little research was done by the government during this time on homelessness as it was not seen as an issue. Many turned to the Salvation

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Army for help, the largest hostel in Westminster has seen 12 million pass through its doors since 1910. The late 1920's again saw the question of slum housing and its solution causing concern.

The anti-slum campaign became one of the first social issues to invoke widespread national concern, and use modern methods of mass publicity, ranging from newspaper reports and broadcast talks to appeals by the Church of England and speeches by the Prince of Wales. At one point, a committee of the National Housing and Town Planning Council in 1928 showed that the slum problem had not improved since 1918, and that there were 1, 000, 000 unfit and 2, 000, 000 overcrowded houses (Couch 1990 p18). Clearance was encouraged by Labour's Housing Act of 1930 (the Greenwood Act) which offered subsidies based on the number of families rehoused.

It enhanced the power of local authorities to pursue redevelopment. Local Authorities were required to submit five year plans for slum clearance. Its intention was also to prevent the pre-war practice of demolition by local authorities without replacement. By 1933, government efforts in the housing field had been reduced to an almost exclusive concentration on tackling the slum problem, and local authority building for general needs was virtually abandoned (Couch 1990 p19). The Greenwood Act through the provision of additional subsidy saw the local authorities building flats rather than houses.

The Tenements were to offer less space and higher densities than previous inter-war council housing schemes, and be more cost-saving rather than houses. The major boom in building for home ownership of over three million

new houses saw the tenure structure change considerably by 1939. The private rented sector fell to 62% of households, while the council sector grew rapidly to 12% and owner occupation to 26% (Class handout). Rowntree's second survey of York found enormous progress but still levels of poverty.

Living standards had improved by 30%, he estimated that this was due to smaller families, increases in real wages and the growth of Social Services (Fraser 1973 p190). But it was World War 2 that was the true catalyst that saw a change in attitude and generated the public feeling that inspired the political will to attempt it. After the Second World War, to a much greater extent than the First, the State was forced to adopt new and powerful policies: The resentment of the 'homes for heroes' broken promises would not be accepted again the people would not return to the depression of the 20's and 30's.

The so-called 'Dunkirk Spirit' of rescue and unity which gave a new sense of obligation of society to all its members and was seen to have brought the nation together in a common united purpose. People did not want to return to bygone days of 1938 but something better a 'New Jerusalem' which could channel post war energy and resources into social goals. It was the publication of Sir William Beveridge's report in December 1942 that caught the British public's imagination and aspirations, it became an immediate best-seller.

Before the end of the month opinion polls revealed that 95% of the population had heard of the report, and 90% approved of it, over 635, 000 copies were sold. Symbolising the popularity of the demand for a new social

order (Fraser 1973 p199). The report was a comprehensive social policy which involved attacking the five giants of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Illness. Squalor referred to poor housing and was to be tackled by a huge expansion of local authority building programmes Beveridge argued that housing was the crucial difference between rich and poor (Fraser 1973 p209).

There was a general consensus from all political party's towards housing at this time that everyone had a right to a home, large programmes of local authority rented housing, and also home ownership was to be encouraged through the use of tax relief on mortgages. Housing problems dominated the 1945 Election. Polls published in June of 1945 indicated that 4 out of 10 thought this the most important issue. 700, 000 houses were lost in the war and house building had virtually ceased (Class handout).

The first British General Election for 10 years resulted in a shock landslide Labour victory. The suspicion of the willingness of the Tory's to carry through Beveridge's celebrated Report proved fatal for the party. The people wanted social revolution and elected Labour to do it. The housing situation at the time was desperate, Bombing had destroyed and damaged millions of houses, and in 1945 it was estimated that 750, 000 new dwellings were needed to overcome shortages and another 500, 000 to complete the pre-war slum clearance, and overcrowding (Hamnett Class Handout).

The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 (Updated 1949) was to tackle the problem. It made planning the responsibility of the authorities and gave them much wider powers of compulsory purchase in order to acquire land for

reconstruction purposes. But Labours promise of 5 million new houses in a decade did not materialise. Labour failed to establish a separate Ministry of Housing and the council housing programme came under the control of the Minister of Health. 55, 000 were built in 1946; 140, 000 in 1947; and 230, 000 in 1948 (Class handout). y 1948 over 800, 000 families had been rehoused since the war, but despite this one survey estimated that in 1951 there were 750, 000 fewer houses than households (Fraser 1973 p209). However, the construction industry was badly hit by material shortages. Housing demand also increased with marriage and birth rates. The state took major responsibility for housing in this period. Private enterprise built no more than 60, 000 houses in any year from 1946 to 1951. The New Towns Act of 1946 was set up to develop corporations to build New Towns.

Although Labour support for council housing has been traditionally stronger than that of the Tory's when they took power in 1951 there was a substantial rise in the number of properties built between 1953 and 1964 annual completion's exceeded 300, 000 (Class Handout). The fifties also saw a lower rate of homelessness than at any other time. Between 1950 and 1960 high levels of corruption were prevalent. The Labour MP Denis Howell faced public disgrace when he was found to be gaining money for warding building contracts to crooked construction firms.

By 1964, one family in four lived in a house built since 1951. This achievement was somewhat overshadowed by Rouge landlords in the private sector the ' Rackmannism' controversy concerning rouge landlords, and the hopelessly weak position tenants were in compared to the power landlords had, although the 1957 Rent Act (modified in 1965) was introduced to <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-development-of-social-policy-in-the-area-of-housing/>

provide a 'fair rent system' for private tenants. It restricted rent increases but did little to help towards the repair of unsatisfactory properties.

By the 1960's local authorities were beginning to recognise that they were unable to keep up with demand for housing and were looking at cheaper ways of providing accommodation for those with lower incomes. The result was the development of high-rise flats in all major British Cities, Dave Beecham in his article for Socialist Review 1994, can be quoted as saying on the subject of Welfare 'The issues haven't changed. The poor are no longer confined to the workhouse: they are imprisoned in tower blocks.' (Class handout).

Apart from the tower-blocks there was a progressive shift from public to private sector, building, owner-occupiers out stripped that for council tenants. The proportion of dwellings that were privately rented, that peaked in the 1950's continued to fall (to 15% in 1970) as the trend of home ownership and council-rented rose. This was due to the greater return from the sale and the large-scale urban redevelopment policies of the 1960's. Those who were unable to secure a mortgage became increasingly dependent on council provision. it was at this time that the Television documentary 'Cathy Come Home' highlighted the problems of the homeless.

As a result the pressure group shelter was set up in 1967 to campaign for better provisions (class hand out). The 1964 Labour party's manifesto pledge was to build 500, 000 houses per annum by 1970. The emphasis was placed on increasing house-building in the public sector, between 1964-70 nearly a half of completion's were in this category. In an attempt to encourage

construction at the time of inflation, the housing Subsidies Act of 1967 modified the basic form of subsidy which had been in existence since 1924, it also provided additional subsidies where blocks of flats of four or more storey were built.

Despite this many authorities failed to maintain their rate of house building. From 1946 to 1970 public sector housing policy passed through three phases. First, from 1946 TO 1945, there was an emphasis on house-building and rents were generally stable. This was followed by a shift of emphasis to rehabilitation and slum clearance, with less house-building and increased rent. From 1964 rents were stabilised and there was a reversion to an emphasis on house-building, which saw a record number of public sector houses completed in 1967. (Balchin 1981 p113).

By the 1970s, the era of mass council house building was over, as governments increasingly looked to the private sector to meet housing needs. 1971 saw the conservative white paper, ' Fair Deal for Housing' it was heralded as ' the most important reform of housing this century' by the Secretary for State, Peter Walker. The main objective was the proposal of the fair rent system, defined by the papers as ' the likely market rent that a dwelling could command if supply and demand for rented accommodation were broadly in balance in the area concerned.

Fair rents were to reflect the value of the accommodation by reference to its character, location, amenities, and state of repair. Between 1935 and 1972 local authorities had been free to set their own rent levels, provided that they were ' reasonable'. Under the 1972 Act they lost this freedom and

autonomy, they became simply rent collectors for Whitehall (Balchin 1981 p117). on resuming office in 1974, the Labour government was faced with a declining public housing sector, completion's that had fallen to an almost post-war low. Many council houses had been increasingly sold off.

Waiting lists were growing and higher rents were being paid by over 2.5 million council tenants. One of their first measures was a freeze on rents until the end of 1974. Local authorities were once again given the right to decide council rents, and the 'no profit' rule was restored to council housing by the 1975 Rent and Subsidies Act. By the late 1970's council housing had become a victim of public expenditure, the number of public sector houses and improvements fell and council house building in 1979 was at its lowest since the 1930's.

In the last days of the 1974-79 Labour government a Housing Bill was presented intending to introduce a 'Tenants Charter', but it was too little too late. The return of a Conservative government in May 1979 resulted in the biggest major change in policy since the 1930's, there had been a broad consensus between all political parties on the importance of maintaining a balance between local authority house programmes and private house building.

This was broken in 1979 when the Conservative government decided that the local authority provision for housing was wrong. In her manifesto message Mrs Thatcher wrote 'the balance of our society has been increasingly tilted in favour of the state ... this election may be the last chance we have to reverse that process. (Class Handout). Plans announced

immediately after the election proposed large cuts in expenditure on welfare services, with a cut in over 40% in local authority subsidies between 1979 and 1983.