

Tenant Participation and the Housing Classes Debate

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Lynn Hancock.

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Abstract

This thesis has two core aims: Firstly, to evaluate two housing/property class models (Rex, J. and Moore, R. (1967) Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook: IRR: London; and Saunders, P. (1978) 'Domestic Property and Social Class' International Journal of Urban and Regional Research Vol.2 pp233-51) for their utility for understanding consumption sector conflicts in the contemporary city. Secondly, and in this context, to investigate the nature of housing and community action group activity in the modern period. The debate which persisted for 25 years over the housing class concept is reviewed in the early part of the thesis. Then, using data from empirical work carried out in the Merseyside region, key aspects of the models are evaluated in the later substantive chapters. Barlow and Duncan's (1988) paper ('The Use and Abuse of Housing Tenure' Housing Studies Vol.3. No.4 pp219-231) is argued to be an important challenge to the housing class/property class models. Barlow and Duncan's arguments, that the housing class theorists over-emphasised the importance of 'tenure', and underemphasised the degree to which action is directed at providers or suppliers of housing, is supported in the empirical work. It is argued that relationships between suppliers of housing, or other dominant authorities, and tenants' and other groups consuming urban resources, are currently organised through participation arrangements. The examination of such arrangements reveals them to be complex and dynamic. Participation schemes create possibilities for tenants' groups to call housing authorities to account, but problems for tenant activists are evident. These arrangements illustrate something of the nature of power in localities and raise questions for those attempting to theorise consumption sector struggles.

In Memory of My Father William R. Hancock

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Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	1
Chapter One: Introduction	2
Chapter Two: Housing Classes and Housing Action Groups:	
A review of two theories	15
Housing classes: part one	17
The concept of class: some problems	28
How useful is the housing classes concept in practice?	40
Housing classes: part two	47
Housing as a source of wealth accumulation	49
Property classes	51
The political implications of property classes	54
Saunders' property class approach: an evaluation	56
Critical perspectives	60
Consumption sectors	68
Problems with Saunders' consumption divisions approach	74
Chapter Three: Researching Housing Classes and Housing Action Groups: some issues in Methodology	92
Chapter Four: Struggles over Occupancy and Ownership In Merseyside	138
A selected history of early tenants' struggles	142
Early tenants' struggles in Merseyside	153
Tactics, strategies and mobilisation	157
Centralisation of policy making: considerations for mobilisation	166
The changing balance of tenure in Liverpool	171
The High Rise Group: struggles over occupancy and ownership in Liverpool	178
The Runcorn Tenants' Federation: struggles over occupancy and ownership in Runcorn New Town	212
Chapter Five: Multi-tenure Actions: struggles for locality and use-values	238
Housing class and theorising multi-tenure community action	239
Peel Road, Bootle (Sefton); Canning (Inner-Liverpool) and Runcorn: multi-tenure community actions	244
A note on the concept of community	245
Peel Road Residents' and Community Association	250
Canning and the Canning Area Action Group: a case study in urban management and conflict management	257
Housing policy in Canning: a conflict between 'dominant authorities'	293
Chapter Six: Power in the Locality: the relationships between 'dominant authorities' and residents' groups	313
Participation and housing management	314

	page
The introduction of tenant participation schemes: background	316
What is 'participation'?	319
Merseyside Improved Houses' tenant participation scheme	325
Liverpool Housing Trust's tenant participation scheme	351
Non-housing focused citizen participation in Liverpool	358
Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Reflections	374
Bibliography	391

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The central concern of this study is to examine the nature of contemporary housing and community group activity and the utility of two models, housing and property classes, for understanding these phenomena. A chief issue in the investigation is the impact of 'tenure' on community action - especially where community groups are made up of two or more dominant tenure types. This focus is one which has not been systematically employed in relation to the housing class/property class theses.

The first contribution to the housing class debate was that of John Rex, in Rex and Moore's (1967) *Race, Community and Conflict*. Early critiques of Rex's housing class thesis focused upon the kind of approach adopted by Rex and Moore: their structural orientation (Richmond, 1973; Rich, 1987) and the presumption of a particular scale of values regarding housing types in the model. Indeed, many critics questioned whether housing related values could be seen as the basis for conflict in the city (Lambert and Filkin, 1971a, 1971b). The most damaging criticisms of the model, however, were associated with the way the concept of 'class' was employed. Haddon (1970) argued that the role of economic returns in determining class situation must be recognised for a class analysis to be properly employed in Weberian terms. A number of authors, often drawing upon Haddon's work (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b; Ward, 1975 for

example), have raised a number of important questions concerning the basis for conflict in the absence of economic returns. Some authors suggested that Rex and Moore confused status group conflict with class conflict (Bell, 1977).

Rex's housing class thesis posed the question, as in Marxist sociology, of whether 'objective' class position would result (or fail to result) in the formation of classes for themselves: collectives having some degree of class subjective identification by members, some common values, and an orientation to conflict with other classes' (Rex, 1971: 295). Critics argued that there were few manifestations of such class conscious action (Bell, 1977). Although the need to carry out empirical work to establish the nature of such action, where it can be observed, was acknowledged (Bell, 1977).

By 1978 the debate over the idea of housing class began to change direction following the publication of Peter Saunders' property class thesis. Saunders argued that a Weberian approach, despite problems associated with Rex's model, could be employed in the analysis of urban political action; the importance of economic returns can be recognised. Since economic returns can be identified in relation to a particular position in the domestic property market (owner-occupation) those sharing this common position can be called a class in Weberian terms. Other

classes include the propertyless (tenants), and a dominant class, described by Saunders in terms of those who supply housing for profit.

The economic interests associated with the domestic property market have important implications for political action as the propertied attempt to protect their position against subordinate classes, and subordinate classes seek to further theirs (Saunders, 1978; 1983). Saunders (1978) envisaged growing divisions and fragmentation amongst housing consumers. Like Rex and Moore's work, Saunders' study was criticised for its treatment of class. Thorns (1981/1982) raised questions over the way owner-occupiers were constituted as a class and drew attention to the significance of divisions within the owner-occupied class. Gray (1982) was concerned that owner-occupation should be recognised for its use-value, and not simply analyzed on the premise of its exchange value. Gray argued that this is significant for political action.

Saunders provided an auto-critique of his model (Saunders, 1983) where he recognised problems with the way property classes were constituted; problems of establishing relations of exploitation between property classes; problems of locating an analysis in a specific historical period where material benefits may not be a lasting phenomena, and that changes to this status would lie outside the control of the classes concerned. Saunders

recognised that there were problems relating property classes to the overall class structure. Indeed, it is this problem which later resulted in Saunders rejecting the model in favour of his more recent consumption sectors model. However, the importance of tenure is retained in this more recent analysis because of its role in defining consumption sector interests. Similarities between the consumption divisions approach and the property class thesis has led some writers to maintain the term 'property class' in order to distinguish it from Dunleavy's sectoral divisions model (Pratt, 1986).

Saunders' consumption sector divisions approach has been criticised because of its difficulty in dealing with the relationship with the production sector in the modern period (Burrows and Butler, 1989). The way owner-occupation and council provision have been conceptualised and contrasted in Saunders' account has been regarded as simplistic and diversionary. Other forms of provision are not taken into account in this model (Sullivan, 1989; Warde, 1990).

One of the most challenging criticisms of both Rex's and Saunder's housing/property class models came in the form of Barlow and Duncan's (1988) paper *The Use and Abuse of Housing Tenure*. Barlow and Duncan argued that Rex and Saunders, respectively, use 'tenure' to refer to social and political characteristics, rather than relations of

occupancy and ownership; each underestimated the importance of action directed at providers over material interests, and both failed to acknowledge the extent to which factors judged as tenure related are often inextricably bound up with wider class and status relationships at the local level. Indeed, Ball (1983) noted that the misidentification of certain ideologies with owner-occupation has promoted the view that owner-occupation has particular political effects, and serves to close off inquiry into alliances with tenants in political action (Ball, 1983). Barlow and Duncan's critique is, therefore, an important starting point; its validity is a significant step towards evaluating the utility of the housing/property class models and the role of tenure more generally in housing and community group action.

In this thesis, then, I examine housing action group and community association activity, assessing the importance of material interests as a basis for conflict and evaluating the way tenure is represented. Through this investigation I examine the role of 'suppliers' of housing during what may be observed as conflict, or conflict management, in the contemporary urban sphere, especially in relation to the voluntary sector which failed to be encompassed in Saunders' consumption sector analysis, or indeed in Rex and Moore's (1967) work. The way housing classes relate has been an important question which has often been raised in relation to the housing/property class

models. I argue that in the contemporary period relations between suppliers and consumers, or providers and users: potential conflict groups in the consumption sector, are organised in 'participation arrangements' which require detailed investigation in order to discover the nature of conflict and its management.

These theoretical concerns were investigated using a number of qualitative research techniques. Documented sources (yearbooks, newspaper reports, minutes etc) were drawn upon, and group and individual interviews (mostly informal) were employed in the study. A range of observation techniques, in many contexts, and action research with a range of housing and community action groups were the chief data collection methods. The fieldwork was carried out in and around Merseyside from October 1991 to July 1993, most intensively in the eight months between October 1991 and May 1992.

The fieldwork coincided with a number of developments involving housing and community action groups in Merseyside, which originated from central government urban policies. This context provided great opportunities to witness new community group action and strategies. Developments occurring at the time of the fieldwork included the City Challenge economic regeneration initiative in Liverpool, the development of community action in response to it, and the establishment, and the

campaign surrounding, the largest Housing Action Trust in Britain following the 1988 Housing Act.

Housing issues have long been on the political agenda in certain parts of Merseyside, such as in Liverpool. During the 1980s, for example, housing policy was a core issue in Liverpool City Council's fight with central government over local government autonomy. Council house building continued here when it had all but ceased elsewhere (by virtue of an accounting loophole). Liverpool's 'hard left' council was not one of the wave of progressive 'new left' councils trying to resist Whitehall's growing control in the early 1980s (which included Greater London Council (GLC) and the Greater Manchester Council (GMC)). Some of its policies (including housing), for example, were seen as being regressive and exclusionary (Liverpool Black Caucus, 1986). But even though housing department practice was open to considerable criticism (from the Commission for Racial Equality for example) the council's housing policy had widespread appeal across the City. The importance of housing in the local polity is also reflected in the political hardship associated with raising rents in the council chamber. This, together with the fact that Liverpool has one of the highest rates of poverty in the country (reflected in the fact that the Region has now been declared eligible for Objective One assistance in Europe) accounts for the area having one of the lowest rent levels in Britain.

The popularity of the Militant controlled council (1983-1988) was to some extent regarded as a product of its housing policy. But, while council provision was pursued, Militant would not endorse the ambitions of many local people, often council tenants, to control their own housing by forming housing co-operatives. Despite this, housing co-operatives have managed to develop into an increasingly significant sector since 1974. London's co-operative sector is bigger but this is largely because the GLC declared an amnesty on squatting thus allowing many squatter groups to form co-operatives. Liverpool's co-ops received no comparable encouragement (although they had from the earlier Liberal administration). Co-ops were seen, on behalf of the 'hard left', as a Tory plot to undermine council housing (*The History of Co-operatives on Merseyside*) but the desire on the part of local people to set up, manage and control their own housing persisted.

Other parts of the voluntary housing movement in Merseyside, such as the housing associations, have also had a long history in Liverpool, becoming major providers of social housing long before the 1974 Housing Act which promoted the modern movement. Associations were also advanced by the Liberals in the 1970s as part of their housing regeneration strategy and evolved as the major players in areas where private landlords were withdrawing. They are the major landlords in some wards, and are seeking to expand their activities. This is a major feature of

Liverpool's stock reflected in the fact that the two major housing associations hold housing stock of comparable size to that of a local authority. The role of housing associations has been promoted nationally as part of 1980's housing policy (1988 Housing Act; 1989 Local Government and Housing Act for example). Liverpool, then, may be able to offer useful policy insights to areas yet to see their voluntary sectors expand to fill the gaps left by the removal of local authority provision.

Indeed, the policy of transferring housing stock to housing associations, especially from local councils, has been pursued for a number of years. The impact of property transfers on residents and tenants can be clearly observed in one of the main research areas for this study, in Runcorn. Here stock was transferred from the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation in the late 1980s to four housing associations. The experience of the take-over from the point of view of tenants and the issues of accountability it raises are of importance in the contemporary housing policy context.

Despite a reputation of militant trade unionism and working class politics, the history of Liverpool has been for a long time one of conservatism (Smith, 1984). It was only in the 1950s that the city managed to elect a Labour council (Smith, 1984). According to Smith, historically, political action in Liverpool, when it did take place, took

the form of 'riot', usually along neighbourhood lines, which were often defined on sectarian and (Irish) nationalist grounds. Lacking strong working class organisations, partly as a result of the predominance of casual, unskilled labour and partly because of the importance of other lines of affiliation, the politics of neighbourhood and of so-called 'riot' became a distinctive feature of political action in the city both before and after the first world war, according to Smith (1984). The trades unions have become relatively well organised in the following decades and, correspondingly, studies of political action have tended to focus on the politics of class and upon formal political systems, rather than on questions associated with the contemporary importance of 'neighbourhood' as a basis for political organising.

The contemporary situation is one where tenants and residents have felt the need to take action in defense of their property rights and neighbourhoods, but the situation is markedly different from tenants' and residents' actions of the 1960s and 1970s which were more widely recognised. The earlier tenants' struggles remain important to the analysis, though, because the actions taken by residents and tenants in Runcorn, the struggles for tenancy rights in relation to the Liverpool Housing Action Trust, and the campaign for neighbourhood use-values in Canning and Bootle, each reflect the history of struggles in these localities and changes of strategy in response to the new

housing and urban policies. Indeed the historical experience of struggle has a definitive impact upon local resident actions.

The scale of Liverpool's housing and urban problems, around which residents and tenants may organise, has received recognition. The City's Director of Housing, Mike Maunder, recently estimated the city to have 40,000 sub-standard council houses, around 5,000 long term council voids, 34,000 sub-standard private sector properties, and profoundly unpopular estates in some areas (Maunder, 1992). Of course, the problem is not simply one of houses but is part of the wider problem of poverty and long term leakage of community wealth.

Merseyside's economic problems are well known, the flight of industrial and financial capital from Liverpool and its hinterland is well documented elsewhere and need not be rehearsed here. Post-war economic decline, high levels of poverty, decaying infrastructure, depopulation, and the occasional uprising in the inner-areas have been recognised and commented upon both inside and beyond the region. Bad industrial relations, geography, the unions, the rates, international economic restructuring etc have all been portrayed as explanations for Merseyside's economic ills. The desperate attempts by workers to defend their jobs has been acknowledged, albeit by media not always sympathetic to their plight. But the struggles to

defend property rights, localities and communities have rarely been examined, even by social scientists.

Central government policies of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the most recent wave including the City Challenge initiative, and various European programmes (including the recently declared Objective One Status for example) aim to address problems of poverty and urban decay using public and private sector funding. As part and parcel of many initiatives, consultation with local residents has been a prerequisite before monies are transferred from fund awarding bodies. Indeed, 'consultation' and 'participation' have become buzzwords of the contemporary period, used by public agencies, private organisations and QUANGOs alike. There are a number of popular views held about such participation arrangements, ranging from celebratory to cynical, but few studies have examined these empirically.

Participation relationships in the modern city form the focus of Chapter Six where tenurial relations in the voluntary sector form the focus of attention, although other, non-housing based, participatory mechanisms are discussed. These are also referred to in Chapter Five *Multi-tenure Community Actions: Struggles for Locality and Use-value*. Although the principal aim is to discuss the role of tenure through the examination of residents' groups and actions involving two or more dominant tenure types.

This chapter picks up some of the points made in Chapter Four which discovered alliances across tenure lines in the Runcorn area of Cheshire. Chapter Four discusses the mobilisation process and its contingent factors in the modern context. This fairly lengthy chapter seeks to examine the value of Barlow and Duncan's critique of the housing/property class models. Chapter Three is an account of the research task itself, this follows the main review of the housing classes debate in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Housing Classes and Property Classes: A Review of Two Theories

This chapter reviews two major theories which have sought to explain consumption based struggles, with particular reference to housing. In the first part Rex and Moore's (1967) housing class model is examined. This theory made a major contribution to the theoretical underpinnings of urban sociology in the late 1960s, triggering a debate which would span the following twenty years or so. The housing class debate then changed direction slightly in the late 1970s when Peter Saunders introduced his property class model, and later his consumption sector approach, around which he argued the theoretical agenda for the 1980s. This is reviewed in the second part of the chapter. Saunderson's theory was highly influenced by Rex and Moore's model and, indeed, by other contributors to the field such as Manuel Castells' work on collective consumption in the 1970s. Rex and Moore's model and Saunders' theory likewise faced challenges but in their different ways they also promoted discussions about social policies (housing policies at national and local level and anti-discrimination legislation following Rex and Moore, and national housing policy following Saunders, in particular) and both sets of authors posited alternatives to the policy context they worked in. Many commentators have found themselves in disagreement with Saunders because of his explicit support for privatisation in his more recent writings. Although as Hamnett has pointed out,

Saunders' writings cannot afford to be ignored whether one agrees with his views or not (Hamnett, 1991: 134).

Other approaches to housing action groups such as those offered through community work and the community action literature offer interesting insights, but their value is limited by a tendency to lack theoretical rigour. As Bains (1975) observed 'community action is short of explicit theory, and often appears to be dealing purely in rhetoric or in terms of the practical problems to hand' (Bains, 1975: 15). Here practical problems often refer to the business of organising or guidance on responding to government policy, while the more 'rhetorical' theoretical issues refer to the practice of 'radical' community work and the task of introducing (often) 'revolutionary socialist' ideas to community work at the local level (see Cowley et al, 1977). In this sense struggles over consumption, often based on housing and neighbourhood, are linked to Marxist theories of social and physical reproduction of labour power in capitalist societies and the role of the state. The task of community work is to politicise. The task of the community worker is to draw out the class dimensions of urban problems. Housing action groups are located in theory but they are not theorised.

Rex and Moore's housing class model and Saunders' property classes are presented as offering a contribution towards the understanding of housing and community based

action groups in this chapter, although, as we shall see neither are adequate to the task of addressing the issues raised by the contemporary Merseyside context. The chapter concludes by outlining some of the main issues which are inadequately addressed in both models and those which require further empirical investigation.

Housing classes: part one

The publication of John Rex and Robert Moore's *Race, Community and Conflict* in 1967 ushered in a debate which would persist until the present day in one form or another. *Race, Community and Conflict* was widely acclaimed for its contribution to debates about the segregation of racialised groups in British cities (Sarre, Phillips and Skellington, 1989), urban patterning and the role of public policy in this process. However, the concept of housing class introduced by John Rex received much criticism. The critiques can be grouped broadly into three types: Firstly, and initially, a debate emerged over the methodology and the premises upon which the model was based. Secondly, the housing preferences the authors referred to and, in particular, the notion of a 'unitary scale of values' assumed in the model were contested. Both types of criticism, it was argued, undermined the concept of housing classes. But the greatest challenge to the housing classes model came in the form of the third type of criticism: the questions raised in relation to the concept of class. This

section seeks to examine these criticisms and some of the responses John Rex has made to them. In the first instance it would be useful to outline, briefly, the housing class model as it was originally formulated.

Rex and Moore (1967) aimed to develop a theoretical model which would contribute both to the sociology of the city and the sociology of 'race relations'¹. Indeed, it was argued that it is only through understanding urban processes that some aspects of race relations could be understood. The authors recognised that there would be problems applying the theory more generally because of differing social, economic and political processes operating in other cities, and especially in societies without the substantial public sector that existed in Britain at their time of writing. In Birmingham, they argued, access to housing could be obtained in three ways: through access to mortgages (or other capital) in order to gain access to whole houses owned by the occupants; through the bureaucratic allocation of public sector property; and through the free market in housing space (Rex and Moore, 1967: 39). However, various groups had different abilities

¹ The term 'race' is problematic. Like other writers I reject the notion that 'races' are real. Where the term is used it is done so to refer to socially constructed differences between sections of the population on the grounds of observed differences (eg skin colour). Where possible or appropriate I will refer to 'racialised groups' since this encompasses the social construction process and the 'racisms'- institutional and subjective - which enable such processes to take place.

to command access to the types of property that these forms of access to housing gave rise to.

Rex and Moore (1967) indicated that access to owner-occupation required capital for the deposit and the ability to demonstrate sufficient income to make repayments. Those on low incomes would be disadvantaged in relation to each of these requirements. Rex and Moore noted that migrants were likely to be excluded from building society mortgages because of the widespread belief that migrants would return to their homelands, and because of the greater likelihood of unemployment amongst migrant communities. Some migrants may have been able to raise the deposit through the use of 'mutual aid systems' operating in newly settled communities, according to Rex and Moore. Although council housing was supposedly allocated on the grounds of 'need' many groups, particularly migrant people, were excluded because of local authority policies. The five year residential qualification excluded settlers in Birmingham from such accommodation. In addition, some groups were excluded following housing visitors reports. Commonplace racist perceptions deemed some migrants to be 'undesirable' and conditioned housing visitors' reports on prospective tenants. When migrants did manage to obtain council accommodation it was often in inferior property, such as in housing awaiting demolition (Rex and Moore, 1967).

Rex and Moore (1967) argued that there would be as many housing classes as there are kinds of access to housing but in the case of Birmingham, prior to slum clearance, the following housing classes could be identified: (1) outright ownership of a whole house, (2) ownership of a mortgaged house, (3) council tenancy in (a) a house with a long life or (b) a house awaiting demolition, (4) tenancy of a whole house owned by a private landlord, (5) ownership of a house bought with short term loans and compelled to let rooms to repay such loans and, (6) tenancy of rooms in a lodging house. The authors suggested that these housing situations would have a definite territorial distribution (following Park et al, 1923) and could be ranked from one to six in order of desirability 'according to the status values of British society' (Rex and Moore, 1967: 275). In short, there is an aspiration to move upwards through the housing situations and outwards towards the suburban zones. It was assumed that an individual's housing class position was of the first importance in determining that individual's lifestyle, associations, interests and position in the urban social structure (Rex and Moore, 1967: 36; Pahl, 1970a). Moreover, the authors postulated that those with a 'common market position' in relation to 'the means of housing' could be called 'housing classes' (Rex, 1968: 214), an extension of Weber's contention that those with common market interests and positions in a variety of markets (not simply the labour market) could be called

classes (Rex, 1968). Rex and Moore (1967) suggested that in societies where desired housing is a scarce resource there is a class struggle over the use of housing and that this was the central process of the city. Rex (1968) argued that the housing classes theory indicated something of the 'potential bases of conflict' but 'class conscious groups may not be formed automatically' (Rex, 1968: 216)².

Methodological problems were raised by Rex and Moore's critics³ but for the most part these derive from disagreements over the kind of approach researchers ought to use when investigating urban issues. Richmond, for example, in *Migration and Race Relations in an English City* rejected Rex and Moore's structural approach, and the value of the model to the understanding of race relations in the city. Richmond instead preferred a social psychological approach to the latter. More recently Rich (1987) has also criticised Rex and Moore for their structural orientation. Rich argued for a greater recognition of subjective values in the determination of housing choice. Rex and Moore's attempt to distinguish between sociological relationships in Sparkbrook and historical process in the city is perhaps the more important criticism raised by Rich (1987). Haddon (1970), on the other hand, argued that in focusing on Sparkbrook, a specific locality in the city of Birmingham,

² Refer to Rex and Moore (1967) and Rex (1968) for a fuller discussion.

³ See, for example, Davis's (1970) study of Newcastle, Karn (1967) and Richmond (1973).

rather than upon the city as a whole and the social processes which operated at the city level, the study became removed from its theoretical starting points (Haddon, 1970: 278).

The criticisms made of Rex and Moore's methodology need not concern us too much. Some aspects of the debate will be raised in the next chapter. Rex (1971) responded to the types of criticism offered by Richmond⁴ by drawing attention to the problems involved in using questionnaires to assess housing preferences and attitudes. Rex argued that preferences are often not expressed because they are seen as unrealistic; because of constraints on choice deriving from cultural conditioning; and because of lack of knowledge. In-depth interviewing may overcome some of these problems but the answers would remain hypothetical. Surveyed attitudes in studies of race relations are not particularly revealing either, according to Rex. There are differences between expressed attitudes, beliefs held and actual behaviour. Individual attitudes expressed in surveys do not, therefore, refute the hypothesis (a point supported by other critics such as Lambert and Filkin, 1971a). Rather, meanings and values as expressed through associations are preferred for understanding social interaction in the city. Similar sentiments are expressed by Lambert and Filkin (1971b) who chose not to rely on

⁴ See Richmond (1973).

survey data in their study *Ethnic Choice and Preference in Housing*. Indeed, they argued that

in a situation where choice is... institutionally constrained people will merely tend to respond to the interviewer's question having scaled down any aspiration to what appears to be possible. In theory it might be possible to research into free choice in some hypothetical 'ideal' situation; but are these not irrelevant if explanations are sought about actions occurring within a system of differential access to power? (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b: 332)

Many critics of Rex and Moore's methodology appear to be motivated to respond to their emphasis upon the constraints on black and ethnic minority people's housing decisions. Such critics argue instead for a more prominent role for individual choice in determining housing location and type, such arguments are clearly reflected in Davis and Taylor's (1970) paper. Davis and Taylor disagreed with Rex and Moore's contention that recent migrants are forced into resident landlordism. From their study in Rye Hill in Newcastle-upon-Tyne they suggest that the existence of a large number of absentee landlords, who often bought houses for this purpose long after their own housing needs had been satisfied, provided evidence to support their argument. Asians in Rye Hill, they argued, have 'a very strong drive to property ownership' (1970: 68). Furthermore, the processes described by Rex and Moore failed to explain why resident landlords or owner-occupiers rejected offers of re-housing by the local authority. The

situation found in Rye Hill requires an explanation which takes into account the migrants' demographic characteristics, values, aspirations and their methods of realising these aspirations, rather than one which relies on the 'single variable' of discrimination, according to these authors (Davis and Taylor, 1970: 68).

Rex (1971) has pointed towards the methodological problems involved when using questionnaires to assess housing preferences (noted above) in partial response to Davis and Taylor's (1970) criticisms. Moreover, Rex argued that sociologists should give accounts of the constraints that are known to exist before going on to look at the 'choices' that are made. Pahl (1970b) and Lambert and Filkin (1971a and 1971b) concurred with this perspective. Indeed, Lambert and Filkin have suggested that Rex and Moore did not view racial discrimination as the only variable, rather, they emphasised the competitive market system, and that subjective meanings of the situation are a product of the market and not of free choice. As such, research and analysis should concentrate on the system of constraints rather than upon individual and group preferences. Researchers ought to be concerned with differential power (Lambert and Filkin, 1971a). However, Lambert and Filkin did suggest that the Newcastle study, and others such as Ward's (1975) study in Manchester, allowed for the extension and refinement of the Sparkbrook study. They pointed to the need to examine the variety of

meanings held by different groups in relation to their housing situation (1971a). For Lambert and Filkin (1971b) the housing behaviour found in the Davis and Taylor study could also be explained with reference to constraints in other areas such as in employment and those associated more generally with the insecurity of being an immigrant 'subject the hostility from those with official power' (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b: 2.11). There is a need to understand different patterns of constraints, the effects of these on social relations, how these are mediated through power structures and the variety of responses and subjective understandings held by participant actors (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b: 2.11).

Housing preferences and choices are, of course, related to the values held by individuals and groups in a particular society. Although the extent to which values will be reflected in such choices is a matter of debate. There is, however, sufficient evidence to question Rex and Moore's assumption that 'there is a unitary status-value system' in the city (Rex and Moore, 1967: 9) and that the housing situations described by Rex and Moore can be ranked in order of desirability 'according to the status values of British society' (1967: 275). Lambert and Filkin (1971a and 1971b) suggested, for example, that in an urban society, characterised by divisions along the lines of class and ethnicity, multiple value systems would seem to be indicated. A number of other writers (Cooper and

Brindley, 1975; Bell, 1977; Sarre et al, 1989) have tried to show how the behaviour of some groups in relation to housing preferences and location is determined by a range of factors including income, present housing occupied, 'culture' and stage in the life cycle. This may problematise the explanatory power of the housing classes model since, if a 'unitary value system' is not evident, the basis from which conflict emerges is unclear (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b; Sarre et al, 1989). Lambert and Filkin (1971b) did suggest, however, that the model could be refined and extended to account for these criticisms.

Rex has responded to this criticism of the model by conceding that 'multiple value systems do exist and more complex models could and should be built' using the model outlined in *Race, Community and Conflict* as a starting point (Rex, 1971: 297). Though Rex (1977) did suggest that it is possible that there is a dominant scale of values and that this is recognised even by those who do not accept it. In *Colonial Immigrants in a British City*, Rex argued the importance of not allowing the formulation of a more complex model 'to build in a justification against minority groups because they were not held to want what the majority wanted' (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979: 128).

Whilst it can be acknowledged that the model 'left too little room for the possibility of different desired ends' (Bell, 1977: 40), it is perhaps worth considering the role

of what Rex called the 'dominant scale of values' and what Bell labelled 'the "homes and gardens" or "suburban ideology"' (Bell, 1977: 39) for conflict in urban areas. While Rex considered the importance of this in terms of understanding the basis from which conflicts over housing can emerge, a perspective similar to that of Pickvance, who largely supported the housing classes model (Pickvance, 1975 cited in Ward, 1975), Bell, on the other hand, regarded the role of housing ideology differently. The ideologies which surround home ownership are argued to serve a variety of purposes including the continuation of the on-going system. Housing can be a 'social base' for oppositional conflict but can also be a deeply 'integrating' force. Housing can constitute a 'social base' to support the status quo (Bell, 1977)⁵.

It could be argued in the contemporary context there is probably a 'dominant scale of values' in Britain to an extent that is even more pronounced than in 1960s Birmingham. A scale of values which holds owner-occupation

⁵ Bell argues that the dominant ideology around housing has been an integrating force which is seen in the role it has played in women's subordination, in the reproduction of labour power, and in the creation of markets for consumer goods and the motor car industry. The ideology around suburban home ownership, through interest rates has provided new ways of extracting surplus value from housing. In short, he argues that ideologies around housing have helped to stabilise and integrate societies. 'Far from being the central source of conflict in urban areas as the original formulation suggested, housing has been the central source of integration in urban areas. And this integration, which is operated through the ideologies of housing, serves the purposes of the on-going system (1977: 39-40). I return to some of these points in Chapter Four.

as the ideal, and is underpinned by both political and financial support from governments. It is, therefore, a desired tenure because it confers economic benefits and property rights, in addition to its status conferring components, unavailable in other tenure types. This is reflected in the way that tenants in the 'better' council estates have bought their homes, which in turn has exacerbated the marginalised position of many other council tenants. If this position is accepted, however, a question remains over the basis from which conflict arises.

The concept of 'class': some problems

The concept of 'class' has been the target for most of the criticism directed at Rex and Moore's model. The main points could be summarised as follows: (1) That housing occupied is a *reflection of power* in the housing market, rather than a cause, and that the focus of analysis should be on the means of access - not on present position in the housing market (Haddon, 1970); (2) That Rex misinterpreted Weber in failing to acknowledge the importance of economic returns in the Weberian idea of property classes (Haddon, 1970; Ward, 1975). This latter criticism is reflected in Haddon's (1970) arguments over the distinction between 'disposal' and 'use' in Rex and Moore's model; and in Ward's (1975) thesis which followed this line of reasoning to the conclusion that Rex and Moore described status conflict rather than housing class conflict.

Haddon's (1970) paper was one of the first to question the assertion that conflict over housing is between groups defined in terms of their present housing position. Indeed, he argued that people's housing situation is the end result of the housing market, and therefore ought to be seen as 'an index of the workings of the social substructure' (Haddon, 1970: 129). Haddon suggested that the emphasis should be on the 'means of access to desirable housing and the ability of different people to negotiate the rules of eligibility' (1970: 129). Rex and Moore however used the classification of types of housing directly to define conflict groups. He argued that the source of this confusion can be found in Rex's misinterpretation of Weber's point that 'within the categories of the owners of property it is possible to distinguish a sub-category: the owners of domestic property' (1970: 130). Rex saw Weber's distinction between different class positions *within* the categories of 'property' and 'lack of property' to be of fundamental importance. Weber saw class position as equivalent to market position, a dimension of the distribution of power in a community. The main difficulty was that Weber was talking about *disposing* of goods and skills in the market to produce income, the immediate source of control over life chances, not *using* these goods for personal consumption (Haddon, 1970: 132). Haddon argued, therefore, that 'the use of housing is an index of achieved life-chances, not primarily a cause' (except that bad housing is

associated with other deprivations). The use of housing cannot be used to define class situation. 'Rex and Moore, then, confused "disposal" with "use"' (Haddon, 1970: 132).

The points Haddon made, that housing is a reflection of power in the market, rather than a cause, and the problem of whether housing class situation is a present or potential position, were also raised by other writers such as Lambert and Filkin (1971b), Sarre et al (1989) and Ward (1975) who each drew on Haddon's paper in their arguments. Each of these authors (and others such as Pahl (1972) and Lambert (1975) supported Haddon's argument that the emphasis ought to be based on the means of access rather than define classes using present housing situations.

Rex has replied that

it would have been nonsensical not to recognise that the kind of houses and tenure which an individual actually possessed when observed was one indicator of that individual's power in the market or allocation system (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979: 128).

Nevertheless, Rex argued, the type of housing occupied is a very good indicator of the strength of its occupants in the housing market. Furthermore, Saunders (1983) has argued that the possibility of improving one's housing position in the future does not refute the theory, instead it simply recognises the possibility of 'housing class mobility' (1983: 72).

The recognition of housing class mobility, however, raises the issue of a household's relationship to the means of housing. In turn this suggests that the underlying reasons which determine a household's position in relation to the means of housing such as class (arising out of the labour market) for example, must be recognised, for these are of great importance for determining housing situation. Rex and Moore themselves recognised the importance of labour market position in gaining access to private housing (1967: 37-39). In the contemporary period Forrest (1987) has shown how housing mobility is strongly related to position in the labour market. Questions therefore arise over the degree of autonomy the housing market has from the labour market and, indeed, the relationship between the consumption sector and the productive sector more generally. How important, in this context, is housing class?

Rex has suggested that, while it could be argued.....

that a man's market situation in the housing market depends in part upon his income and therefore on his situation in the labour market, but it is also the case that men in the same labour situation may come to have differential degrees of access to housing and it is this which immediately determines the class conflicts of the city as distinct from those of the workplace (Rex and Moore, 1967: 274).

However, this seems to be endowing tenure with a level of importance which is questionable (Duncan and Barlow, 1988). And, as Saunders (1983) has argued in relation to his own

property classes thesis, it is unclear whether two factory owners holding identical jobs should be placed in different classes because they occupy different tenures. While certain interests vis a vis housing would differ and certain other economic and political interests may differ, whether their overall interests are sufficiently different to warrant their allocation into separate class situations is debatable.

Where writers have used Rex and Moore's housing class model in their studies (such as Lambert (1975) and Szelenyi (1983) they have tended to use 'access' as the criterion for defining housing classes. Rex has emphasised that access should be used for defining classes in subsequent writings. However, it may be useful to expand further on the debate over use and disposal of housing and the implications of this debate for the development of housing classes. The importance of a further examination is reflected in Ward's argument that 'confusion between disposal and use of housing is more significant because it places limits on the range of interests which can form the basis for the development of housing classes (Ward, 1975: 115). Ward (1975) noted the economic interests which emerge from the importance of housing as a market, the economic defined interests of those who produce and/or market housing for profit, those who subsidise housing production, and the interests of those who consume housing. As a consumption good, housing is important for maintaining

a style of life and as a symbol of status. Ward argued that housing is usually only used to improve life chances by those who engage in it professionally (ie landlords who could be included in the list of housing classes relatively easily). Drawing on Haddon's argument he argued that the housing class analysis would require that housing interests were conceived of in economic terms in relation to the disposal of housing. He recognises that owner-occupiers are able to dispose of property to improve life chances but the scope of this is limited because economic interests lie in retaining it... 'the costs of a house sale and purchase are sufficient to deter most people from treating an owner-occupied house as an investment property' (Ward, 1975: 115). Rather, it is status threats to the quality of life that may constitute the most significant housing interest: the use made of housing. An analysis of these, he argues, 'may reveal the existence of aims which are more realistically seen in terms of conflict' (Ward, 1975: 125).

From a reading of Max Weber it is evident that the importance of economic returns would need to be recognised in the concept of housing class, as Ward (1975) and Haddon (1970) argued. These interests need not be defined in relation to the disposal of housing, as these authors have suggested, because mere possession of goods and skills, and not actual disposability, can be used to define class situation. But it is only in the market place where real

class formation comes into play on the basis of economic interests (Weber, 1968).

The factor that creates 'class' is unambiguously economic interest, and indeed, only those interests involved in the existence of the market (Weber, 1968: 928).

Indeed, Weber argued that 'class situation' referred to

The typical probability of
(1) procuring goods,
(2) gaining a position in life and
(3) finding inner satisfactions.

Such a probability derives from peoples 'relative control over goods and skills and their *income producing uses* within a given economic order' (Weber, 1968: 302 [emphasis added]).

While Ward (1975) has noted that status issues are an important concern which may lead to conflict and one to be understood in terms of the use of housing rather than disposal, Bell (1977) drew attention to the way that status concerns undermine the housing class concept. Status concerns, according to Bell, weaken the prospect of housing class consciousness. Drawing upon Rex and Moore's Sparkbrook study directly Bell argued that the authors themselves found that many people re-defined their housing situations in status rather than class terms. People thought of themselves as being in a graded social situation rather than a conflict one. They expected housing mobility and as a result housing class consciousness was weakened (Bell, 1977: 39). Rex acknowledged this in his 1971 and 1977 papers. In *The Concept of Housing Class and the*

Sociology of Race Relations (1971) Rex argued that the formation of 'class for itself' is a highly contingent process. However, it should be noted that the relationship between status and class can be so complex that it may be difficult to identify interests as being specifically status concerns. Weber recognised that in saying 'status groups are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life' he was risking an 'oversimplification' (1968: 937). If it is accepted that styles of consumption may be determined either directly or indirectly by class situation then it is clear that consumption may reflect class situation as much as it represents status group and in turn it may be determined by it. Weber does indicate clearly that status groups are often created by property classes and that 'status may rest on class position of a distinct and ambiguous kind but is not solely determined by it' (Weber, 1968: 306-7). Furthermore 'status may influence, if not determine, a class position without being identical with it' (Weber, 1968: 306).

The question of status, however, also raises the question of conflict within rather than between classes: the nature of housing class conflict. It is to this debate that we must now turn.

Bell (1977) suggested that the housing class concept does not specify either who is exploiting whom, or the

nature of the relationships between classes. He proposed that what may be regarded as housing class consciousness may be better interpreted as conflict within rather than between classes.

Residents' groups, tenants' groups... all those myriads of voluntary associations that are based on locality, neighbourhood and tenure category can be shown to be in defense of a narrow status interest and against the status interests of others within the same class (Bell, 1977: 38).

In support of this argument Bell cited the case of council tenants in Birmingham who were 'worried about other (black) tenants not the local authority' (1977: 38). This is a similar point to that of Ward who argued that 'analysis of status threats may reveal the existence of aims which are more realistically seen in terms of conflict' (Ward, 1975: 125). On the other hand, if access is examined then *competition*⁶ rather than *conflict*⁷ could be observed according to this author. People accept the rules of competition as legitimate and are more concerned with achieving their desired ends than opposing rivals. Ward, therefore, argued that the housing classes model confuses competition for housing with conflict over housing.

⁶ Competition is defined as 'a struggle for scarce resources, normatively regulated within a framework of rules, not necessarily a hostile contention. Competing individuals may not even be aware of the competition. When competition breaks the rules, it transforms itself into conflict' (Gould and Kolb, 1964 cited in Ward 1975: 116).

⁷ Conflict is defined as 'a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals' (Coser, 1956 cited in Ward 1975: 116).

Similar criticism have come from Lambert and Filkin (1971a and 1971b), for example, who asked 'in what sense does conflict occur, is it within or between classes?' (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b: 2.8).

In response to some of these arguments, and Bell's in particular, Rex suggested that one cannot simply refer to a one-sided exploitation ('who is exploiting whom?'). In order to understand the relational aspects of class a consideration of the meaning of exploitation, conflict, bargaining, equal and unequal exchange, power, domination and legitimate authority is necessary. Only then can the concept of class in the mixed economy of housing allocation be fully comprehended (Rex, 1977). Rex argued for the recognition of the fact that the bargaining relationship upon which the class struggle rests consists of a two-sided deployment of sanctions (1977: 221). As such it is insufficient to talk of a one-sided exploitation as the only possible outcome. He did not claim, however, that exchange relationships are either equal or beneficial to both parties. In the same way, labour market relations cannot simply be regarded in terms of a one-sided extraction of surplus labour. Drawing on Weber, Rex argued that the concept of class rests ultimately on the concept of power and the capacity to force the compliance of another. It is of little importance whether sanctions are those of market power, political action or legitimate authority, or who is exploiting whom. Instead, according

to Rex, the important issue is that 'different groups have different degrees of power to secure desired goals' (1977: 221) and where certain groups have less access to housing, for example, black people and women headed households, they can be referred to as housing classes, 'not simply, as Bell suggests, referring to conflict within classes' (1977: 221)⁸. But the problem of establishing the relational aspects of housing classes is not resolved here. Indeed, Saunders found the same problem in his own property classes schema (Saunders, 1983: 96). Saunders argued that owner-occupiers may adopt strategies of solidarism or exclusion in pursuit of their housing interests, against those of dominant or subordinate interests. A notion of exploitation is established in Saunders' work but not in the sense that one class is exploiting another, and the relations are not ones of antagonism. This is not surprising for in Weber's own work the relational aspects of class remained unspecified. Weber did indicate that his model of property classes was 'not dynamic': class struggles and revolutions may not result from the juxtaposition of property classes. Indeed, he suggested that they may find solidarity with each other, against other, less privileged, classes.

⁸ However this could be seen as a move away for the housing classes model which places importance on 'the kinds of housing available... tenures legally recognised... and the form of allocation' (Rex, 1971: 295).

In view of this it is not surprising to find that there has been a debate over the extent to which housing classes can be analogous to classes emerging from the means of production. Rex had argued that the model..

posited a variety of relationships to the 'means of residence' and a tendency to conflict analogous to the relationship to the 'means of production' and consequent industrial conflicts of Marxist sociology' (Rex, 1971: 295).

The model raised the question, as in Marxist sociology, of whether 'objective class position' would result (or fail to result in) the formation of classes for themselves: collectives having some degree of subjective identification by members, some common values, and an orientation to conflict with other classes (Rex, 1971: 295). Bell (1977) had suggested, however, that using the above criteria few urban social movements would qualify as class conscious movements, although there is a need for detailed empirical investigation to assess how many and to what extent. In addition to arguing that where conflict can be observed it was generally within rather than between classes (noted earlier) he suggested that...

what we have been witnessing is a succession of briefly spluttering local action groups that, if successful, will indeed direct resources away from others who have not or cannot mobilize... These movements are short-term and populist... have great promise but little sustained staying power (Bell, 1977: 38).

Rex (1977) took issue with Bell on this point. He asked: how are the groups arising as housing class conscious

groups 'briefly spluttering' in comparison to industrially based classes? He drew attention to the less permanent trade union and labour organisations in cross-societal comparisons and in other times. He then argued that Bell's picture of industrial class conflict was rather idealised. Working class organisations have been less than perfect or complete in their organisation and are often confused and contradictory in their aims (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979: 240). Rex (1977) pointed out that while black people, on the whole, belong to trade unions and vote for the Labour Party, these organisations do not defend their interests, even in the labour market. Indeed, the Labour Party itself was observed to be directing resources to its members away from those who cannot or have not mobilized. At the same time community organisations who focus on housing matters (amongst others), like black organisations in the USA, 'have assumed an importance which is more than a splutter... more than the ephemeral groups which Bell refers to' (Rex, 1977: 222), although it was not expected that they would replace the Labour movement in defending the rights of marginalised groups. I shall return to this issue below where Saunders' discussion of the analogy in relation to his own property class model is elaborated.

How useful is the housing classes concept in practice?

A number of writers have preferred to use an interest group analysis to examine political movements in housing at

the local level because of the problems associated with applying the housing class analysis in observed situations. Ward (1975) suggested that 'interest group' is entirely consonant with an analysis stressing the significance of access to desired housing; it can incorporate some of the main features of the housing class analysis, although it loses the ability to utilise the ramifications of Weberian class theory and becomes a more general analysis of the use of power by one interest group seeking to achieve their aims against other groups with different aims. For Ward (1975), interest group analysis has the capacity to distinguish between objective interests observed by the analyst and subjective definitions held by participants; and distinguish between 'real interests' and other forms of consciousness. As conflict between classes is possible, so too is conflict and competition between interest groups. Ward adds however, that conflict cannot be assumed from the fact of objectively defined common interests. Analysts must demonstrate the nature and existence of conflict. Although...

where recognition of common interests results in conflict, Rex's analysis may be highly pertinent in allowing us to understand how the associational structure of an area is related both to the expression and management of such conflict' (1975: 125).

Lambert and Filkin (1971b) also found it useful to employ the concept of interest group. These authors find this mode of analysis particularly useful in an attempt to understand total situations of which housing is just a part

and is less restrictive than housing classes. Lambert and Filkin believed, however, that there is value in retaining the concept of class but on the premise that it is limited to the analysis of access (class-in-itself). Such an analysis ought to begin from the perspective that access is a facet of a class society, controlled by bureaucratic managers in this context, according to these authors (Lambert and Filkin, 1971b).

A number of writers have used the concept of housing class to examine urban politics and processes in the limited way of class-in-itself. Lambert and Weir (1975) suggested, for example, that it is possible to view housing classes 'not so much as action groups but as categories on the basis of which, through shared interests and a common collective consciousness, social action may be initiated and conflict with other groups occur (latent classes)' (Lambert and Weir, 1975: 32). Payne and Payne (1977), on the other hand, preferred to develop the concept of 'housing status group' in their analysis of housing stratification in Aberdeen. These authors accepted Haddon's critique of the concept of class in Rex's model, but argued that while people who are defined in terms of their present tenure may not share a common class position in Weberian terms, they do share a common status position. Payne and Payne suggested that Lambert and Weir's concept of 'latent class' may be applied to describe the 'broader underlying condition' but housing status group was better

suiting to the analysis of the smaller tenure based units which may form 'action groups' at the 'actual level' (Payne and Payne, 1977: 133). These authors argued that while tenure positions largely derive from occupational class, housing tenure also generates particular lifestyles and probabilities of experiencing housing stress. In this sense, housing is not simply an index of life chances as Haddon suggested, but is the...

means by which the inequalities of the occupational structure are transferred into the wider social structure. The closer the fit between occupation and housing type, the more sharply stratified are social inequalities (Payne and Payne, 1977: 134).

Payne and Payne's study demonstrated the importance of housing as a cause of certain life chances. The authors suggested that housing status group be used to understand action groups based on actual tenure (1977: 133). Indeed, they argued that

housing status groups can have a more immediate potential for consciousness and action, than social class, since their manifestations are both physical and visible in the local milieu... successful resident associations are almost universally based on a single or dominant tenure type, their strength resides in a shared awareness of common identity and lifestyle (1977: 156).

Payne and Payne (1977) argued that urban sociology and the study of housing must take account of the role of action groups in particular localities. These authors do not, however, examine such groups in any detail, nor do they explore the mechanisms by which housing status groups develop consciousness and action.

A number of other studies have used a perspective similar to that of Lambert and Weir (1975), examining the reasons why housing classes-in-themselves did not become classes-for-themselves in the course of their analysis.

What is required for housing classes to become housing classes-for-themselves? Rex has argued that 'any theory needs to specify the ways in which those with a common "market situation" organise or fail to organise to take action in pursuit of their interests' (1968: 217). And, in *The Concept of Housing Class and the Sociology of Race Relations* (1971) he suggested that at a minimum this must involve

the development of organisational means, the affiliation of individuals to organisations as officers, members, clients and supporters, the development of social norms, values and sentiments shared between members of the class and a degree of consciousness of kind (1971: 298).

In an earlier part of this discussion it was shown that certain factors may inhibit the recognition of housing class consciousness and therefore prevent the development of classes-for-themselves, the role of status orientations was one such example. Rex has also pointed towards other factors which may either lessen the likelihood of organising or the prospect of conflict. The business of organising, for example, may lessen the chance of conflict if aims and functions develop which are contradictory. Rex has also suggested that ethnicity may exist as a cross-cutting variable which may obscure the lines of conflict

(Rex, 1968: 1971). Although it should be noted that Ward (1975) discusses a situation in Manchester where 'despite differences in the ethnic status of those concerned, recognition of common housing interests led to significant achievements by housing action groups' (Ward, 1975: 120⁹).

There have been a number of studies which have highlighted factors which may explain why conscious movements did not emerge and, in particular, factors which acted against the recognition of common interests. Lambert utilised the housing class concept in an attempt to explain why successful community action did not emerge in a redevelopment area despite the efforts of a groups of residents and the assistance of a community worker. Lambert notes the diversity in objective housing class positions and the variety of subjective definitions of the situation which together resulted in a failure to organise around common interests and to take action accordingly. Lambert, Blackaby and Paris (1975) objectively identified a fairly homogenous group in terms of housing class: people who rent their present accommodation and who must rent for the foreseeable future. These authors also used a managerialist perspective to examine the regulation and control of scarce housing in Birmingham. In particular they examined the workings of the waiting lists and how the operation of 'the queue' served to divide the interests of applicants, resulting in a variety of subjective

⁹ see Ward (1975) chapter 14 for an expanded discussion.

understandings and the absence of any collective definition of the situation. These authors argued that 'the queue' prevented the political nature of housing from being recognised and obscured the basis for class struggle. Crothers (1974) found the housing class model a useful starting point in his preliminary work on the Aro Street area of Wellington, New Zealand, while Szelenyi (1983), in a study of two Hungarian cities found it useful to employ the housing class concept in a study examining the extent to which housing privilege is retained or redressed under a socialist housing system. Szelenyi found that between 1950 and 1968 social class inequalities in housing were exacerbated but people 'were not generally conscious of these increasing inequalities... chiefly because the housing situation of all classes had visibly improved' (1983: 73).

Rex argued that we may

begin to look for a partial development of housing classes so that they become 'classes-for-themselves' in the study of organisations, norms, values, beliefs and sentiments of the associations which exist in great profusion in the city (Rex, 1971: 299).

This is the significance of Ward's comments that...

where recognition of common interests result in conflict, Rex's analysis may be highly pertinent in allowing us to understand how the associational structure of an area is related both to the expression and management of such conflict (Ward, 1975: 125).

By 1979 Rex had adapted and expanded his housing class model (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979) but the debate centred less on Rex's model and increasingly upon Saunders' new housing classes theory.

Housing classes: part two

Peter Saunders recognised some of the problems raised in response to Weberian class analysis, including those identified in relation to Rex's model. In his earlier work, however, he argued that a Weberian approach to housing could be applied nevertheless (Saunders, 1978; 1983). Saunders identified three main criticisms made of Rex and Moore's housing class analysis. The first, and least important in Saunders' view, referred to the points raised by Haddon (1970) that Rex had identified housing class position in terms of present tenure occupied (noted earlier). Saunders suggested that this line of criticism is problematic because, for the most part, people's power in the housing market and tenure currently occupied largely coincide at any particular point in time. That the occupants of a particular tenure may improve their housing situation is not a refutation of the theory, merely a recognition of the possibility of housing class mobility (Saunders, 1983: 72). Secondly, Rex's assumption of a unitary value system as the basis from which struggles over housing may emerge is more damaging to the thesis, according to Saunders. He agreed with the view that

multiple value systems seem to be indicated but argued that if housing classes were identified by objective criteria, such as the material benefits which derive from the occupation of a particular tenure, then shared common values need not be important to a Weberian approach. Indeed, this argument formed the central tenet of his own property class thesis. The third criticism of Rex and Moore was seen as being the most significant and referred again to Haddon's (1970) arguments, in this case the point that what Rex and Moore saw as housing class conflict was in fact status group conflict. According to Haddon, housing is an element of consumption and consumption reflects lifestyle and life chances, rather than causes them. Housing classes would be constituted around the ability to derive income from property if the analysis is to be properly located within a Weberian framework. Haddon (1970) argued that it is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between the housing market and the domestic property market. The domestic property market gives rise to class divisions because of the differing ability of various groups to realise returns from the disposal of their property (negatively privileged and positively property classes).

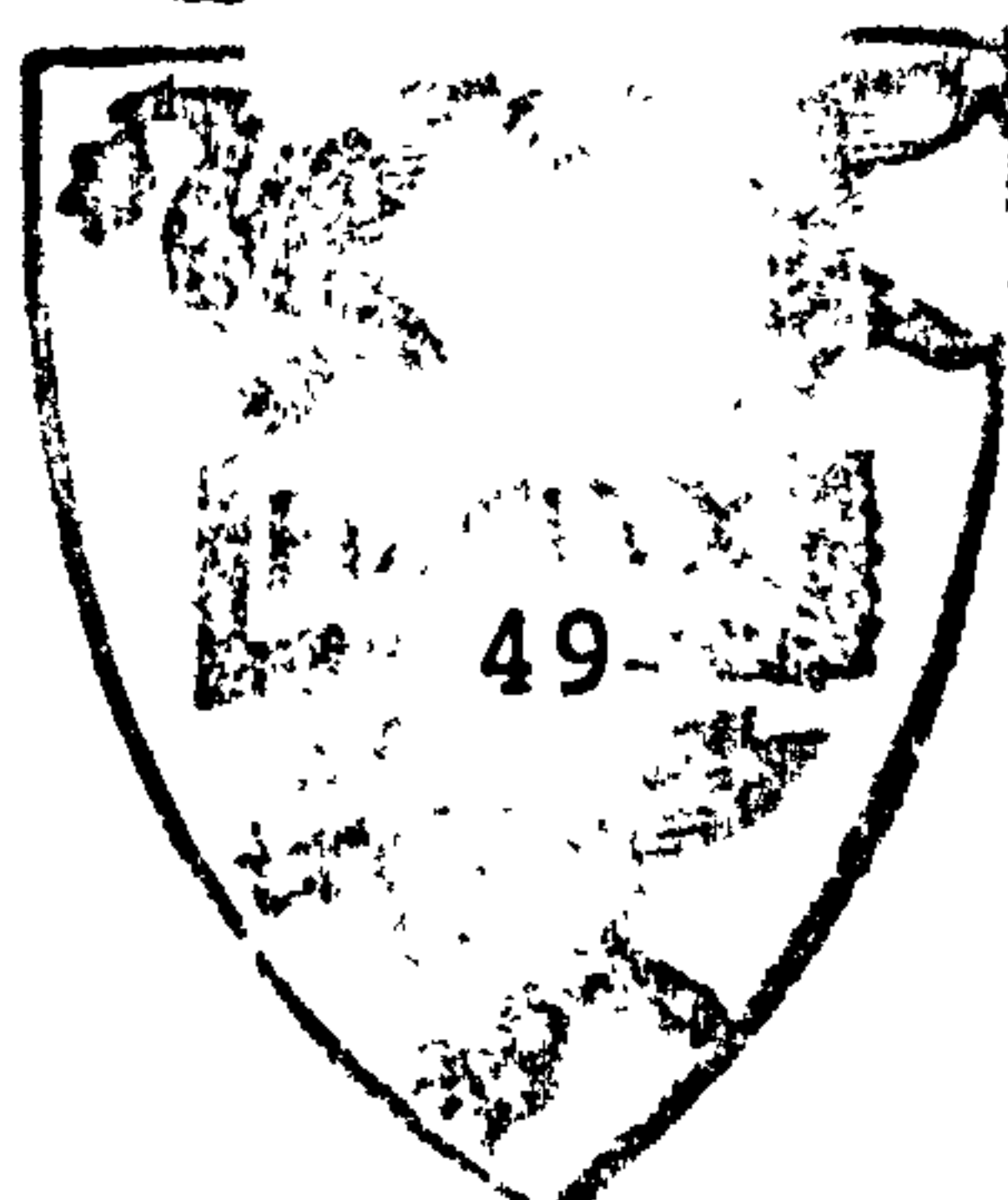
Although Saunders supported Haddon's arguments as a refutation of Rex's housing class thesis he drew attention to two major problems in Haddon's critique. Firstly, Haddon failed to recognise the significance of the

potential to use property for returns. Haddon focused on the ability to dispose of property for returns and thus neglected to appreciate the importance of retaining tenure in a Weberian approach. Owner-occupiers, for example, can accrue material gains from their property while council tenants are unable to do so. The second problem with Haddon's argument, according to Saunders, concerns his point that housing is merely a consumption good, and is therefore, to be located within the sphere of status groups. Saunders suggested that if housing can endow its owner with the potential and the reality of wealth accumulation, and action is taken in defense of this potential, then such action ought not to be simply regarded as status group conflict (Saunders, 1983).

Housing as a source of wealth accumulation

Because income can be realised from domestic property, as in the case of owner-occupation in Britain, Saunders argued that there is a 'basis for the identification of a distinct middle property class' (Saunders, 1978: 248). Although there are problems contained in his analysis which have, to a large extent, been acknowledged (Saunders, 1978; 1983; 1986a; 1990), it is useful to examine the source of wealth accumulation for this property class and the way class is constituted before examining these.

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Saunders identified three principle sources of wealth accumulation arising from owner-occupation in modern Britain: disproportionately high rates of house price inflation, as in the early 1970s, though this is perhaps the least significant source of wealth; the level of interest rates in times of (and relative to) general inflation; and government subsidies especially Mortgage Interest Tax Relief - the most important source of wealth. Saunders also suggested that owners can also increase the value of their property by expending their own labour power on activities such as 'Do It Yourself' (DIY) and other home improvements which are unavailable to tenants (Saunders, 1978; 1983). There are real material interests associated with home ownership and these, according to Saunders, can be seen as the basis for the identification of property classes.

Saunders recognised that there are other benefits associated with home ownership but argued that while having an impact upon the lifestyle and life chances of the occupants in comparison with tenants, they do not constitute a basis for class formation in Weberian terms. Such benefits include the right to enjoy beneficial use, control and disposal, together with an ability to choose where to live (limited by ability to pay) for example (Saunders, 1983: 84).

Property classes

Owner occupation would be viewed as a middle class in a Weberian property class system, according to Saunders. In this way the analysis rejected traditional Marxist conceptions of class in which divisions arise only out of production relations and where the divide between housing consumers is seen simply as being ideological. Saunders argued that his thesis differs from Rex's because shared values and spatial factors are considered unimportant (Saunders, 1978; 1983). Saunders therefore argued that there are three distinct property classes to be identified according to their differing relationship to the distribution of housing, although there may be further subdivisions. The first consists of those involved in the supply of housing: private capital in the form of finance capital institutions which lend money for buying or building houses; industrial capital involved in the construction of property; and commercial capital involved in the exchange of property in the housing market, such as estate agents. This class may also include those who own land and buildings (private landlords) and derive income from those who rent their property. Saunders recognised that conflicts may arise between different types of capital. The interests of finance capitalists, for example, who seek to maximise profit by lending money, may conflict with those of industrial capital whose interests lie in obtaining cheap loans. But Saunders suggested that

each share common material interests in supplying housing as a commodity for profit (Saunders, 1978; 1983).

The second, or middle, property class is made up of owner-occupiers who enjoy the use-value of their property but unlike tenants are able to benefit from the exchange value of their housing. In protecting their property values this class may find their interests conflicting with those who supply housing. For example, in an attempt to secure the value of their property owner occupiers may resist plans for neighbouring housing developments or plans to redesignate the green-belt. They may also oppose the interests of tenants. For example, owner-occupiers' interests lie in maintaining or increasing levels of state support through tax relief for themselves, whereas tenants accrue no benefit from this; their interest lies in increasing state subsidies to rented accommodation. Subdivisions are not absent from this class, however. Saunders referred, for example, to the distinction made by Rex and Moore (1967) between those who are outright owners of their housing and those who are purchasing their accommodation through a mortgage, and who have considerable interest invested in the continuation of state subsidies through tax relief, an interest which is not applicable (in a direct sense) to outright owners. Other subdivisions may arise along the lines of size of property, location and age of property. Saunders cited evidence from Dennis' study in Sunderland (1970, cited in Saunders, 1983) where it was

found that owner-occupied residents in a redevelopment area merely benefitted from greater rights of control over their property (relative to tenants) rather than the benefits of use and disposal, in support of these distinctions. Nevertheless it was argued that, objectively, owner-occupiers share sufficient interests to be called a class because the potential for wealth accumulation remains (Saunders, 1978; 1983).

The third property class consists of those who do not own their domestic property (the propertyless), tenants who gain no financial benefit from increasing exchange values. Again, although there may be subdivisions along the lines identified by Rex and Moore (1967), such as between those in purpose built council accommodation and those in short life property awaiting demolition, private tenants in rented rooms and those enjoying the comfort of luxury apartments, Saunders suggested that they all share common interests in lower rents and an expanded rental stock (1978; 1983).

In his discussion of the way that the different property classes relate to each other, Saunders concentrated upon how the middle property class (owner-occupiers) may come into contact with either the private capital class or those lacking private domestic property¹⁰. He suggested that owner occupiers may adopt the type of

¹⁰ See above and Saunders (1983) chapter 6.

strategies identified by Parkin (1974). Briefly, Parkin suggested that a dominant class may adopt strategies of exclusion, while subordinate classes tend to use strategies of solidarity. These modes of social closure (ie the way in which they seek to maximise returns by either increasing their access to them or by restricting the access of others) identified by Parkin are regarded as being particularly useful in the analysis of middle property class political action (Saunders, 1978: 247). Of course, because of their place in this property class schema, owner-occupiers may adopt either of these strategies depending upon the direction from which their interests are threatened. If threats originate from the propertyless class their the most appropriate mode of social closure may be that of exclusivity, but if threats to property values stem from private developers, for example, then solidarity may be the dominant mode of action. Interestingly, Saunders found not only this to be the case from his study in Croydon (see Saunders, 1983 chapter 6) but that, in mobilising against the interests of propertyless groups, owner occupiers often represented their interests as being those of the public as a whole (see also Rose, Saunders, Newby and Bell, 1976).

The political implications of property classes

One of the major considerations thrown up by the property classes model, and by the increasing division

between ownership and non-ownership of domestic property more generally, given the material benefits of the former, is its significance for political action and its analysis (Saunders, 1978; 1983). These growing divisions are argued to be a cause of fragmentation amongst housing consumers as a whole, as the dominant classes seek to protect their economic interests against those of subordinate classes (Saunders, 1978). In making this argument Saunders rejects Castells' (1977) view that 'a crisis in the provision of the collective means of consumption (such as housing) has generalised political consequences affecting a broad range of different classes' (in Saunders, 1978: 249). And supports Pahl's point that ...'when the capital gains derived from housing advantages a whole class in society at the expense of another... it has socially divisive consequences... Certainly I see this tension between ownership and non-ownership increasing in the years ahead' (Pahl, 1975: 298; in Saunders 1978: 249).

While housing consumers may be divided in terms of their ownership or non-ownership of domestic property in struggles to protect their own interests, it does not follow that these divisions will be reflected in any systematic manner in other spheres of political activity. Saunders' more recent study (Saunders, 1990) found that housing tenure had little impact upon the way people viewed their class position. Most people saw class arising from their position in the labour market, evidence supported by

Devine's study in Luton (Devine, 1990). This raises one of the central problems with Saunders' property class analysis, that of how it relates to the overall class structure (Saunders, 1983), a problem which contributed to his later rejection of the thesis. I shall return to this point later, however, it is necessary first to examine other problems identified with the property class model.

Saunders' property class approach: an evaluation

Although Saunders' analysis received some support his property class approach to housing struggles was also widely criticised. Pratt (1982; 1986) supported the theory of home ownership as the basis for a middle property class. Home owners were found to have a high degree of housing class consciousness which she argued was evident in their voting behaviour in Vancouver (Pratt, 1986). Tenants on the other hand tended not to view their interests in housing terms. Where tenants expressed views, however, subsidies targeted towards home owners were supported! Pratt argued that the evidence 'fits more comfortably with the Weberian schema of domestic property classes' (1986: 178) which emphasises the division between owners and non-owners of domestic property and the material benefits which accrue to the former for shaping political alignment. In this sense Saunders' model was preferred to that of Dunleavy (1979; 1980), for although Dunleavy's assertions may find some support: that the ideological effect of

subsidies targeted to home-owners may be to politicise the housing issue, there is a need to avoid Dunleavy's tendency to make causal links with correlational data (Pratt, 1986). Moreover, Pratt argued that Dunleavy's model would logically lead to the conclusion that no consumption divisions exist in Canada, since his model is based on the idea that consumption sectors become increasingly salient and important to political alignment as forms of consumption become polarised in an individualised - commodity - private mode and a collective - service - public mode. Those in collective modes of consumption are assumed to align themselves to the left, and those involved in individualised consumption to the right (the parties on the left are seen to support subsidies for public housing, while those on the right are seen to favour owners with mortgages) (Pratt, 1986).

Pratt (1986) argued that in the Canadian context no fragmentation between individualised and collective forms of housing consumption exists like that observed by Dunleavy in Britain. Rather, since the mid nineteenth century home-ownership and private tenancies have been the two dominant tenure forms. State intervention has been minimal, accounting for no more than two per cent of the national housing stock in the early 1980s. As Canadian home owners are influenced by their housing interests in their political alignment in the context of predominantly

individualised consumption Dunleavy's model is regarded as having limited value in this context (Pratt, 1986).

Thorns (1981, 1981/1982) also lent support to the theory although not without some qualification. Thorns argued that there was a case for viewing owner-occupiers as a middle property class but raised a number of questions concerning the way the class is constituted. For example, how is the analysis to be applied in societies where this is the dominant form of tenure? From his study in New Zealand, Thorns (1981/1982) suggested that there is a need for more research into housing sub-markets and the nature of the relationship between labour market and housing market positions, especially as the evidence showed that it is those better off in the labour market who secure the greatest capital gains from their property. Further, his research showed that home ownership does offer some owners the means for storing and accumulating wealth and that they do share common interests which are separate from those of tenants because of this accumulative potential. However, the differentiation within this sector, which derives from a number of factors such as location in the market and region, influences relative gains and was increasingly resulting in a gap between those owners who possess the most expensive properties and those occupying the cheapest. This situation promoted the view that, rather than a single class, owner-occupiers are in fact a series of fractions which accumulate their wealth not only at the expense of

tenants by also at the expense of other owner-occupiers (1981: 708), as their wealth accrues from savers, house buyers and from taxpayers through tax subsidies (Thorns, 1981). Thorns argues that class solidarity is less likely when owner-occupiers are involved in exploiting other owner-occupiers in this way (Thorns, 1981).

Shucksmith (1990) also found support for Saunder's property class thesis in his study of rural housing in Britain. He argued that Saunders' notion of domestic property classes illuminated the basis for conflicting policy objectives, policy formation and distributional outcomes. In particular he argued that the interests of property suppliers are likely to be divided regarding the construction of new housing in the countryside, but

the interests of owner-occupiers are quite unambiguous, and this is the principle justification for the adoption of this typology. Owner occupiers gain by restrictions on the supply of new house construction which tend to inflate the exchange value of their own houses, and this is true whether they are mortgagees or outright owners, locals or newcomers (Shucksmith, 1990: 215).

The propertyless have the common interest of increasing the size of the rented stock and lower rents. They gain from increased levels of house building and the relaxation of planning controls.

Shucksmith acknowledges that it is 'hard to distinguish this class orientation empirically from status

groups organising to protect their privileged lifestyles' (Shucksmith, 1990: 217). Shucksmith also provides little evidence to demonstrate conflict between property classes or to indicate their modes of organising around common interests. We may also note, in response to Pratt's contribution, that tenure does not impact upon voting patterns in the British context. Where owner-occupiers have voted Conservative it has been conservatism that has motivated them rather than the ownership of domestic property (Saunders, 1990; Devine, 1990). Furthermore, in response to Thorns' arguments, as Saunders has pointed out, the major source of income has come from government subsidies (Mortgage Interest Tax Relief for example in Britain) and most home owners have an interest in this (Saunders, 1984).

Critical perspectives

Although they related their argument more closely to Saunders' consumption sector divisions, Savage, Watt and Arber (1990) offered an interesting critique of the property class model. They argued that the high rates of housing mobility observed in their research in Guildford provided evidence against viewing housing tenure as an axis of social closure. 'Tenure formation' (following Goldthorp's discussion of class formation) would be a prerequisite for social identity and collective action, according to these authors, but did not seem to be

indicated. Gray (1982) also questioned the idea that home ownership constitutes a basis for social and political action. Drawing on a number of studies (Lambert et al, 1978; Cooper and Brindley, 1975; and Agnew, 1978 for example, in Gray, 1982) he argued that home owners in Britain do not appear to be sufficiently interested in their homes as a financial asset and that 'some home owners have little if any opportunity to either maintain or increase the already low selling price of their home' (Gray, 1982: 287). It should be noted, however, that while the latter is undoubtedly the case for some home owners in particular areas, evidence from Thorns (1981) and Saunders (1990) suggested that the majority of home owners do recognise that their home is also a financial investment. Clearly the dated nature of Gray's supporting evidence is significant here. But, as Gray suggests, it is difficult to divide the economic from the non-economic motivations underpinning the action taken on behalf of home owners in protection of their interests. The fact that housing, even owner-occupation, is not simply a financial asset is, in Gray's view, sufficient to warn against seeing the primacy of economic considerations in actions taken on behalf of home-owners. Action taken in defence of local schooling and in protection of the local environment, for example, may also be seen as part of the more fundamental divide between the middle and working classes and the status concerns of the former (Gray, 1982).

Saunders provided an auto-critique of his property classes model, whilst continuing to support the general thrust of the thesis. His first line of criticism related to the arguments put forward by Thorns (1981) and Savage et al (1990) and concerned the way property classes are constituted. The argument that the number of classes is not exhaustive is a familiar one following both Weber's original formulation and Rex and Moore's (1967) model. It is also clear that some categories of housing do not fall neatly into either the categories of owners, non-owners of domestic property, or the type of suppliers outlined in Saunders' property classes model (co-operative, co-ownership schemes, housing associations and local authority housing departments, for example). It is also possible for an individual to belong to more than one class, such as owner-occupiers who let a room (Saunders, 1983). Saunders suggested, however, that this form of criticism may be less significant since such confusion and complications may merely reflect the fact that class divisions are not clear cut and that problems of classification do little to undermine the general argument (1983: 96).

The second line of criticism is one that has also been levelled against Rex and Moore's (1967) theory and is concerned with the fact that the model is not dynamic and that class ought to be treated as a relational concept with the nature of exploitation made clear (see Bell, 1977).

Saunders conceded that this is a more serious problem but argued that relations of exploitation can be identified in the model, in relation to the source of returns from owner-occupation. The major problem was that owner-occupiers do not, as a class, exploit non-owners as a class. Owner-occupiers derive their increasing wealth from the majority of the population (through tax relief) or from specific sectors of the population (such as those seeking to enter the tenure and building society investors). While home-owners have different interests from tenants this does not constitute an antagonistic relationship (Saunders, 1983: 96).

Saunders also drew on Bell's (1977) critique of Rex and Moore in his discussion of the third problem with the thesis: that 'the model represents a distributional treatment of class regarding it as yet another commodity that is distributed more or less equally in society' (Bell, 1977: 38). Saunders suggested that this is less valuable as a critique of *his* thesis because it is premised on the view that housing is a unique commodity since it provides for wealth accumulation, unlike other commodities. Housing has both use and exchange value whereas almost all other commodities are primarily purchased for the former. It is this factor that makes owner-occupation highly significant for the basis for the identification of property classes.

The thesis was also criticised because it is based on specific historical conditions. That is, periods of high rates of house price inflation relative to general inflation, and especially during periods of low interest rates, have boosted the accumulative potential of owner-occupation. Government subsidies for housing improvement and tax relief, accorded the greatest significance for wealth accumulation in the model, are also products of a particular political and historical period in Britain (Edel, 1982; Saunders, 1983). Edel (1982) argued that, in the light of historical evidence, the accumulative potential of home ownership is unlikely to constitute the basis of a long term split in the working class based on housing. But Saunders has given two reasons why this argument should not lead to a refutation of his thesis. Firstly, the context of accumulative potential is likely to continue, largely because the supply of housing is limited (because of land shortages and planning restrictions), and since it would be politically damaging, given the high level of public support for home ownership, to abolish government subsidies to the sector (Saunders, 1983). Secondly, if conditions were to change sufficiently to alter the accumulative potential of home ownership then it is clear that the mode of analysis must alter to account for these changes, this is within the scope of Weberian analysis. It is clear that the Weberian concept of property class would no longer be sufficient but the Weberian concept of parties may aid a revised analysis.

Therefore the problem is that the analysis is premised on specific conditions being present, circumstances which lie beyond the scope and influence of the respective classes, but this is not regarded as sufficient to undermine the analysis (Saunders, 1983).

The final problem that Saunders referred to in his discussion of the problems contained in his property class approach is that it remains unrelated to the overall class structure. In view of this it is unclear whether two factory workers holding identical jobs should be placed in different classes because of the fact that one is a home-owner and the other a council tenant, for example. While it is clear that their interests *vis a vis* housing and certain other economic and political interests may differ, it is unclear whether their overall interests are sufficiently different to warrant their allocation to separate class situations (Saunders, 1983). While recognising this as a problem with the analysis Saunders asserted the view that 'conflicts over housing, analyzed objectively, cannot be reduced to the classic class categories of political economy' (Saunders, 1983: 98). Nevertheless it is this problem which resulted in Saunders' abandonment of the property class thesis. Indeed, he argued in response to those authors who had broadly supported the thesis (cited above) and in response to his own earlier formulation that

the attempt to integrate housing tenure divisions into class analysis is....

fundamentally flawed because it elides the analytically distinct spheres of consumption and production.... class relations are constituted only through the social organisation of production. It is confusing and unhelpful to use the same theoretical and conceptual tools to examine relations constituted in the sphere of production around ownership and control of the means of production, and relations constituted through the process of consumption even when (in the case of home ownership) private ownership of the means of consumption may function as a source of revenue (Saunders, 1984: 206).

Despite this, however, he did not support some Marxist writers' views that an analysis of consumption should be reduced to an analysis of production, he strenuously rejected such a proposition. In his discussion of Castells' contribution to urban social theory, for example, he took issue with Castells' Marxist critics who argued that Castells' focus on collective consumption was misguided because consumption cannot be understood in isolation from production relations (see Mingione 1981, for example, cited in Saunders, 1986a: 223). Saunders suggested that such critics, on finding the argument that consumption creates effects independent of those generated in the sphere of production objectionable, were really trying to argue the primacy and centrality of production relations (Saunders, 1986a). Saunders argued that while the two spheres are undoubtedly related in that the location of people in the production sphere will have an enhancing or constraining effect on their consumption capacity, for example, this does not mean that analyses of consumption must always be preceded by analyses of

production. While production and consumption spheres are related this does not mean that consumption cannot be examined as a distinct area of study (Saunders, 1986a).

Despite the apparent rejection of the property class model, Saunders argued that tenure is important to the investigation of social stratification; class divisions are not the only basis for social divisions in contemporary capitalist societies; and that people are engaged in political struggles which derive from their position in consumption sectors (as Dunleavy (1979) argued). Although home ownership does not change peoples' class interests it is a major factor in helping to define their consumption sector interests (Saunders, 1984: 206). Before discussing Saunders' sociology of consumption it is perhaps worth noting that Saunders' move away from his property class thesis to the analysis of consumption sector divisions does not represent as great a shift as may at first appear. Pratt (1986) suggested that although Saunders abandoned the 'property class' *label* [Pratt's emphasis], for the reasons indicated above, he retained the essential elements of the thesis in his focus on the division between the owners and non-owners of domestic property and the difference in material interests which this division throws up (Pratt, 1986: 166). Indeed, Pratt preferred to retain the terminology of the 'property class' analysis in her paper in order to distinguish it from the consumption sector approach used by Dunleavy (Pratt, 1986).

Consumption Sectors

Saunders drew heavily on Dunleavy's discussion of sectoral divisions in his analysis but regarded Dunleavy's arguments as requiring refinement for two reasons: Firstly, in order to move away from the ideological importance of private consumption (for voting behaviour for example) towards the material significance of the divisions between owners and non-owners. Secondly, Saunders saw refinement to Dunleavy's model as necessary in order to illustrate the cultural significance of private ownership. For Saunders this was strongly associated with the capacity for owner-occupiers, for example, to enjoy a higher level of control and autonomy in their lives than tenants (Saunders 1986a; 1986b; 1990).

In Saunders' view there is a major division emerging between those who are able to satisfy their consumption requirements through private ownership (eg of housing, transport etc) and those who must rely on collective provision through the state (Saunders, 1986a). He traced the increasing importance of consumption sector divisions in Britain to the changing dominant mode of consumption that has occurred in the past 150 or so years, changes which have reflected economic and political change in the country. He observed that there has been a shift from market based provisions to socialised forms through to privatised consumption, which is likely to continue. The

latter phase, and the one we are currently witnessing, represents a change in property rights even though provision is often assisted through the state (such as, in Britain, through Mortgage Interest Tax Relief for owner-occupiers). The major point to note is that there is an increasing division between the privatised majority and the marginalised minority (Saunders, 1986a). We should perhaps also note that although Saunders saw the process as one that was likely to continue he did not regard it as one of inevitability. The reasons for its continuity can be found, according to Saunders, in the fiscal crisis of the state, popular support for the changes (despite the widespread support for the NHS for example), higher wages and living standards over the post-war period, and the impact of the momentum itself. For example, cuts to public transport subsidies may result in higher rates of car ownership, this may in part result in more costly public transport, promoting more car ownership, and even costlier public services for those forced to rely upon them.

In order to examine the sociological significance of consumption sector divisions it is necessary to consider the economic, political and cultural implications of this division on people in the respective consumption sectors. The economic significance of consumption divisions is outlined in Saunders' property classes thesis, in which the potential to accumulate wealth from home-ownership is stressed, this is a central tenet of the analysis.

Although the shift to consumption sectors appears to have been partly undertaken to take into account other aspects of consumption like education, health and transport. To summarise, material gain from owner-occupation derives from house price inflation occurring at a higher rate of general inflation, relatively low rates of interest, government subsidies (such as Mortgage Interest Tax Relief and home improvement grants) and the ability of householders to increase their property values through the expenditure of their labour power on their houses. Saunders recognised the historical specificity of these income generating factors together with the fact that gains are not spread equally throughout the sector but, he argued, taken over a substantial period of time (the last century) people in the sector as a whole have made substantial, if uneven, gains (Saunders, 1986a). Furthermore, property owners are able to realise material advantage by using their property to secure credit, thus allowing expenditure on other items as well as their property. Saunders argued the political implications of consumption based divisions around the way these divisions fragment the working class, affect peoples' voting behaviour and their attitudes towards state provided services. Saunders was concerned to emphasise that these political effects should not be dismissed as either a product of ideology or regarded simply in terms of their contribution to false consciousness (see Fletcher, 1976 for example), rather they are grounded in real material interests. However, as we saw above, Saunders later

suggested that the impact of consumption divisions, especially in housing, on voting behaviour for example, has perhaps been overstated (Saunders, 1990). The source of material advantage and disadvantage, political interests and the cultural significance of, and associated with, consumption sector divisions is found in the 'nature of property rights in the means of consumption' (which are different from those property rights found in the production sphere) (Saunders, 1986a: 325). Saunders drew on the work of social psychologists like Goffman¹¹ and the argument that personal property is important in the expression of social identity, in his discussion of the cultural significance of consumption based divisions. He emphasised the importance of the capacity to control these objects of ownership. Private property, then, allows its holder exclusive rights of control, use and disposal. Private owners of the means of consumption are able to exert a higher level of autonomy in their lives, an aspect that has increasing significance in a context where peoples' autonomy in the formal productive sphere is often absent in the modern period. Of greatest significance in this cultural aspect is the capacity of people to control their homes through the ownership of domestic property, according to Saunders. Saunders suggested that variations will occur over time and space precisely because these are cultural dimensions of the consumption question, and not qualities internal to consumption objects, he argued that

¹¹ Goffman (1961), cited in Saunders (1986a).

this aspect deserves further investigation (Saunders, 1986). In summary, the essence of Saunders consumption sector approach is that there is an increasing division between those who are able to take advantage of the benefits of private ownership of the means of consumption and to those who must rely on the state for their consumption requirements. It is argued that these have far reaching and profound implications for the distribution of wealth, political action, peoples' life chances and life styles.

Saunders did make a number of qualifications to his analysis. Firstly, he suggested that exclusive property rights need not necessarily be individualised property rights, indeed collectivism may actually result from privatised consumption, in the form of housing co-operatives for example (Saunders, 1986a). But he fails to discuss how this would be achieved. Secondly, he initially recognised that the ability to exercise control through property ownership is not evenly distributed, it is divided along the lines of gender for example. Private transport gives greater freedom to men, and women may find the home a sphere of subordination and labour rather than an area over which they can exercise autonomy (Saunders, 1986a). But, Saunders later rejected this reasoning (Saunders, 1990), on finding that his survey results showed that, while women bore the brunt of domestic work, most women desired home-ownership and take pride in their homes.

He concluded that 'Either the academic feminists have got their theories wrong or millions of ordinary women are too stupid to recognise their own best interests' (Saunders, 1990: 308). The problems with this are two-fold: Firstly it ignores the unequal access afforded to women who live independently of men when obtaining access to owner-occupation (see Morris, 1988) and therefore their reduced capacity to control property. Secondly, as Hamnett (1991) has argued, Saunders does not consider the situation where home ownership may be aspired to and valued by women and at the same time be regarded as a refuge for men and a source of oppression for women. The final qualification Saunders makes is associated with the point raised by Edel et al (1984 cited in Saunders, 1986a) concerning the situation where the increasing availability of private means of consumption may in fact result in diminishing returns. For example, as car ownership increases, giving owners greater control, so may congestion and, as a result, the advantages may be eroded. However, Saunders argues that car owners may still be absolutely better off even if those advantages are diminishing relatively. Indeed, changes in the form of consumption which allow greater control by owners may be more important than the material gains in some cases (Saunders, 1986a). Such as in the case of those who purchased council houses under the right to buy where no change in the consumption good occurred but other benefits accompanying the change in property rights may be of greater significance.

Problems with Saunders' consumption sector divisions approach

Notwithstanding the above qualifications a number of other problems have been identified with Saunders' sociology of consumption. A number of studies called into question the explanatory power of the consumption division approach in relation to political behaviour, as measured by voting intention. Authors such as Taylor-Gooby (1986) and Franklin and Page (1984) suggested that the consumption sector approach contributes little to the understanding of where people derive their political ideas. Franklin and Page (1984) hold that more traditional approaches such as socialization theory still offer superior explanations. Similarly, Taylor-Gooby (1986), in his national survey found that the 'link between consumption sector and political consciousness as measured by voting intention remains unexplained' (1986: 606). However, he did find that consumption location did play a minor role in influencing ideas and that this supported Saunders' arguments around the 'social meaning of private property', particularly around the security and control associated with private property, to the extent that a role existed. However, this did little to undermine Taylor-Gooby's overall conclusions.

Savage et al (1990), as we saw above, focused on the consumption division in housing as a basis for political action and consciousness. These authors drew attention to

the problems of identifying housing tenure as an axis of social closure because relatively high levels of housing mobility are likely to mitigate against 'tenure formation'. They suggested that if council tenants appear to be distinctive in terms of their voting allegiances, for example, this is probably due more to their common class position than their common tenure location.

This brings into focus a second problem with Saunders' consumption sector divisions approach: the question of the autonomy of consumption sectors from other forms of stratification, such as class arising from the productive sphere. Sullivan (1989), for example, argued that tenure ought to be deconstructed and examined from the point of access because if it can be shown that consumption locations derive from class situations the argument that consumption sector divisions constitute independent axis of stratification is questionable. An investigation of access to consumption sectors is required according to this author. Should class be revealed as an important variable then inequalities resulting from consumption location 'must also be attributable in the main to underlying class factors' (Sullivan, 1989: 185). An examination of consumption sectors from an access perspective would also reveal the influence of allocating institutions, and factors like class, 'race' and gender which cannot be simply dismissed as 'cross-cutting' axes of social stratification.

A number of other authors have also asked questions relating to the precise way that production and consumption sectors are related, given Saunders' recognition that the two spheres are *inter-connected*. In the main these questions arise in response to the argument that consumption sectors constitute an independent axis of stratification because the consumption sphere generates independent effects. Warde (1990) demonstrated how expenditure on consumption and especially housing is strongly related to social class, while Forrest (1987) has shown how housing mobility is related to peoples' position in the labour market. Furthermore, Busfield (1990) pointed out that it is (occupational) class that constitutes the fundamental social division in health care, and it is social and environmental factors which give rise to good health and bad health and these in turn limit or enhance people's ability to gain access to private medical insurance. Therefore, from an access perspective the autonomy of consumption sector is questionable.

Burrows and Butler (1989) raised questions concerning Saunders' account of how the consumption sector division/polarisation emerged and, in particular about the connection between changes in the production sphere and their impact upon changes in the consumption sphere. These authors deny that they are arguing for a 'production based determination of consumption practices, rather [they] are arguing for a more prominent role for the articulation of

production with consumption' (1989: 352). The importance of recognising production in the analysis is found, according to these authors, in the way changes in the way production is organised has an impact upon consumption abilities. The decline of Fordism and the restructuring of the productive sector in the modern period has resulted in the creation of a 'core' workforce and a minority 'peripheral' workforce. This restructuring is clearly important in understanding the ability to consume and social polarisation at the level of consumption, according to these authors. Burrows and Butler (1989) accepted Saunders' argument that consumption divisions then take on a life of their own, but argued that the relationship between production and consumption spheres is of a profound importance to the understanding of consumption based developments. Without articulating this relationship Burrows and Butler suggest that 'Saunders is in danger of his position collapsing into a consumption based determinism' (Burrows and Butler, 1989: 353).

Sullivan (1989) criticised Saunders' narrow focus on housing tenure. Saunders' concentration on owner-occupation and council provision, where these two tenures, and those occupying them, are continually contrasted is, according to this author, misplaced. The two tenure split is a product of specific and identifiable historical and political processes (notably the two wars) and is a relatively short lived phenomenon. While

researchers focus on the two tenure dichotomy of council renting and owner-occupation other forms of tenure and the way that these are constituted go under-researched (Sullivan, 1989). Indeed the importance of moving away from the two tenure dichotomy towards the recognition of the historical and contemporary role of, for example, the voluntary sector will be shown later.

Barlow and Duncan (1988) also offered an interesting and important critique of Saunders' use of tenure categories. In particular, they argue that in viewing tenures, such as owner-occupation, as social and political categories in the way that Saunders (and indeed, Rex and Moore) tend to is unhelpful. Barlow and Duncan suggest that housing tenure refers to relations of occupancy and ownership, but Saunders (and Rex and Moore) used tenure to refer to social and political characteristics which go far beyond this. The result has been a 'loss of analytical sensitivity' (1988: 219) which derived from the 'misidentification of taxonomic collectives (those sharing formal attributes) as substantive ones (in which members relate to each other causally or structurally)' (Barlow and Duncan, 1988: 220-225). Saunders (1990) replied to the criticism raised by Barlow and Duncan (1988) by acknowledging that an exclusive focus on housing tenure is dangerous. Nevertheless, he retained his belief in the importance of housing tenure provided that it is integrated into a wider analysis of sectoral divisions where all

aspects of consumption are examined for their influence upon shaping life chances (Saunders, 1990: 335-336).

It is the contrasting of owner-occupation and state provision in this public/private split that leads us to a third line of criticism: the way that these tenures are conceptualised in Saunders' analysis. Warde (1990) argued that Saunders constructed an ideal type dichotomy between collective and privatised modes of consumption which contained an explicit set of value judgements regarding the desirability of one sector over another. Saunders ignored the disappointing aspects of private consumption, the problems generated by commodification and the influence of the suppliers (including government) in the marketing of 'taste' according to Warde. Indeed he argued that Saunders 'seems to be calling for the commodification of everything' (Warde, 1990: 232). The market is seen as offering consumer sovereignty whilst the state is viewed as rigid and unresponsive. Warde suggested that this comparison is 'vastly over-drawn' (1990: 235) and serves to obscure the investigation of other forms of provision (such as mutualist forms), the distinction between service delivery and property and the different modes of access to these. Warde argued that Saunders is encouraging urban sociology to become 'the study of the impulse to privatisation' (1990: 235). Similar criticisms have come from Sullivan (1989) who also drew attention to Saunders' value-laden analysis. In particular he questioned Saunders' arguments

relating to the growth of owner-occupation and the importance of 'ontological security'¹². He suggested that by locating the debate in the realm of psychology it is effectively removed from the economic and political level. Sullivan pointed out that more attention ought to have been given to the way contemporary tenure types have been historically constructed and the role of housing production and provision in this process. From this perspective the desire for home ownership can be seen as a rational response to the actual and perceived benefits of home-ownership, which are transmitted by suppliers and promoted by central government policy (Sullivan, 1989). This author questioned Saunders' conceptualisation of both owner-occupation and council provision on the grounds that Saunders afforded insufficient attention to the negative aspects of owner-occupation.

It may also be noted, as Sullivan's (1989) paper suggests, that the role of ontological security in the growth of home ownership has been debated over recent years. Forrest and Murie (1986) challenged the role of ontological security on the grounds that the desire for home ownership varies considerably across the country (see Saunders, 1990). Similarly, Franklin (1986) has criticised Saunders' account on the grounds that Saunders' discussion is underpinned by the assumption that traditional forms of

¹² See earlier discussion regarding the cultural significance of consumption based divisions.

association, sociability and local social relations have broken down to be replaced by an increasingly privatised urban residential culture. Franklin, in contrast, drew on a number of community studies which suggested that older forms of kinship and informal association have remained resilient and have re-asserted and modified themselves in new contexts. Moreover, rather than this being a main motivation in the drive for home ownership, Franklin (1986) argues that it is lack of suitable alternatives, government policy and the desire to 'achieve culturally appropriate goals within a specific predominantly chosen social reference group' (1986: 34) that more adequately explains the phenomenon. Thus, the buying of a house, and its decoration, internal and external, is predominantly aimed at the householders' chosen reference group which may or may not be locally defined, and is often strongly associated with stage in the life cycle.

In *A Nation of Home Owners* Saunders responded to his critics by arguing that ontological security is an important dimension for home owners - despite the difficulty in operationalizing the concept - and that this has not been disproved by his critics. He argued that home ownership is not essential for ontological security, indeed he recognised that 'non-owners may seek and achieve an equivalent sense of security through other channels' (1990: 303). However, 'private ownership of a house is for many people the cornerstone of a sense of independence and of

their conception of their own place in the world' (1990: 303). Saunders argued, in response to Franklin's criticisms, that privatism is not synonymous with the desire for ontological security. Drawing upon studies similar to those cited by Franklin he rejected the privatism thesis, arguing instead that home ownership may actually promote greater involvement in social and associational life. It may be added, however, that when Saunders points towards the external display of houses purchased from councils (eg under the right to buy) in support of his arguments he may in fact be supporting Franklin's claim that home ownership may be pursued in order to reflect achieved status in the eyes of the householder's chosen reference group.

The problematic aspects of home-ownership have been emphasised by a number of authors including Sullivan (1989) and Forrest (1987) as part of a critique of Saunders' idealistic conceptualisation of this tenure. Forrest, for example, shows how home ownership often represents constraint and financial over-commitment for householders rather than choice and material gain in contemporary Britain. Indeed, the situation where one in five home owners who purchased their property since 1987 were experiencing negative equity by 1992 (Hughes, *The Guardian* 12.11.92) should provide a warning against viewing home ownership in an uncritical way. Forrest's discussion of the divisions within the British housing market, which

derive from changes in the labour market and in turn impinge upon the productive sphere, together with the large scale state subsidy of home ownership should alert authors to the problems of seeing housing tenures in the kind of polemic embodied in Saunders' analysis. In addition, differential house prices affect housing choice, accumulative potential, and mobility in the labour and housing markets, which can be from owner-occupation to council property as well as vice versa. Saunders' analysis therefore ignores the divisions within the owner-occupied sector and the impact of housing markets and sub-markets in different localities on the accumulative potential of home ownership (Forrest 1987; see also Thorns, 1989; and Forrest et al, 1990). Because of this diversity in the owner-occupied sector many of Saunders' critics have also doubted the extent to which home-owners have shared material interests (see also Burrows and Butler, 1989).

The usefulness of the public/private dichotomy employed by Saunders has also been called into question by Busfield's (1990) study of medical care. It will be recalled that Saunders argued that the consumption sector approach was not only applicable to questions around housing but other aspects of consumption such as transport, education and health. Saunders actually paid little attention to these other sectors. Similarly, writers reviewing Saunders' analysis, whilst criticising his narrow focus on housing tenure, have also tended to concentrate on

housing related questions. Busfield's study is, therefore, an important contribution to the debate. Busfield (1990) found little evidence of consumption sector divisions in the field of medical care, despite the growth of private medical insurance in modern Britain. Rather, people consume both public and private provision together with that of voluntary organisations. Using the type of analysis put forward by Saunders, the role of the voluntary sector would remain unexplored (this is an especially important sector regarding the care of the terminally ill and abortion services for example). Again, in this analysis, the advantages of private provision are not as evident as one would expect given Saunders' argument around the material benefits of private consumption (Busfield, 1990).

Further criticisms of Saunders' tendency towards polemics have been raised by Burrows and Butler (1989) who found this inclination in a number of aspects of Saunders' analysis. For example, while they accept the general point that a major division is emerging between those who can satisfy their consumption requirements through the market and those who are reliant upon state provision, they see the polarisation identified by Saunders as simplistic and exaggerated. They suggest that readers are led to believe that the 'middle mass' could be equated with privatised consumption whilst the 'underclass' may be associated with socialised provision. They then suggest two reasons why

this is an inappropriate conclusion. Firstly, there is sufficient evidence to show that it is precisely the 'middle mass' who derive greater benefit from socialised forms of provision than the poor. Secondly, owner-occupation is by no means the exclusive domain of the 'middle mass', rather marginal groups are found in a variety of tenures, often in the private sector in certain localities. Other polarities are seen in Saunders' argument for the primacy of revealed preferences over objective interests in the analysis of consumption (unlike his earlier work on property classes where Saunders' position rested on defining interests objectively). Burrows and Butler argue that this results in the conceptualisation of preferences at the individual level and the neglect of the way these are mediated through complex social and political processes (Burrows and Butler, 1989: 357). They point out that given the way that the choice is polarised in Saunders' account between 'the imposition of an "objectivist" structure of "real interests" or the acceptance of the "subjectivist" discourse of "the people", it is implied that social scientists must accept "unmediated populism"' (1989: 357).

Saunders contribution, like that of Rex and Moore, lies not only in the lively theoretical debate which has emerged since his property class formulation but also in the challenge to existing orthodoxies which assert the primacy of production in stratification in modern Britain

and, indeed, the notion that public necessarily means 'good' in left thinking. While his analysis has been undermined by an ideological perspective which asserts the sovereignty of the market, the debates that have emerged were necessary (Hamnett, 1991). Ironically, however, these debates have demonstrated the need to return, at least in part, to some of the more traditional concerns of urban sociology.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that Rex and Moore's housing classes thesis, and Saunders' property classes/consumption divisions approach, have not only faced criticism on methodological grounds but also because of their dependency upon specific historical conditions. Those critics who have been dissatisfied with Rex and Moore because of their particular approach to urban issues I have found to be less convincing. Both models are very clearly products of their particular time, but it is difficult for any analysis be otherwise. Perhaps most importantly, we can add that both sets of authors have been criticised for their treatment of class in their analysis: The way class is conceptualised, how many classes should be identified, and where the sub-divisions are, through to the problems each have with dealing with inter-class and intra-class conflict. In addition, the nature of exploitation is inadequately discussed in both models. Both approaches, similarly, fail to investigate the relationship between the property/housing class system and the overall class

structure, although both sets of authors stress that conflicts over housing cannot be reduced to class arising from production. At the same time it is acknowledged that the spheres of consumption and production are undoubtedly related and both to a greater or lesser degree influence life chances. The problem of how the two spheres relate remains, however, unresolved. We may also observe that Sullivan's critique of Saunders does echo that of Haddon's (1970) critique of Rex in the sense that each calls for an analysis of access to housing, and consumption sectors more generally, in order to clarify these issues. Note also note that both Rex and Saunders have attempted to broaden their analysis in order to move away from the narrow focus on tenure. In Rex's case this led to his discussion of the concept of 'underclass' (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979) - since rejected, and in Saunders' case the discussion of consumption sectors. Barlow and Duncan's (1988) paper, however, remains useful in presenting the arguments against viewing tenures, such as owner-occupation, as social or political categories in the way that Saunders' theses have suggested.

Both Peter Saunders' and Rex and Moore promote an understanding of where lines of affiliation may be drawn and where analysts may expect divisions to occur in housing and community action at the local level. Although, support is also found for their critics. I will argue that the idea of 'housing class consciousness' remains useful as a

metaphor. In particular, Rex's ideas around the transition from housing classes-in-themselves to classes-for-themselves, through housing class consciousness; and Rex's assertions concerning the importance of examining the ways in which 'those with a common market position organise or fail to organise in pursuit of interests' (Rex, 1968: 217) offer interesting challenges to those attempting to theorise struggles in the consumption sector.

If a unitary value system, or even a dominant scale of values, cannot be seen as the basis from which conflict emerges, for the reasons Bell (1977) indicated, then, where does conflict emerge from? Ward (1975) argued that status is more important as a basis for conflict, although Bell (1977) suggested, on the other hand, that status concerns were more likely to undermine collective consciousness. Nevertheless, it could be argued that status and class concerns can be combined, for Weber himself argued that class and status are intertwined. Here the Weberian concept of party may be useful for understanding 'action' group.

Bell (1977) also asked: in what sense does conflict occur? Indeed, he usefully emphasised the need to explore the relational aspects of housing class. Rex, as we saw, answered this question but failed to resolve the issue. Indeed, Weber himself failed to specify the way property classes relate to each other. Bell (1977) further argued

that housing class conscious groups were relatively scarce, they were seen to be short term, populist, with a tendency to direct resources away from those who could not or failed to mobilise. Although, as Bell recognised, this remains an empirical question.

Equally important, as Rex's writings show, is the importance of examining the factors which may explain the reasons why consciousness and action do not develop. I follow Ward's (1975) argument that conflict cannot be assumed from objectively defined common interests, and support his contention that analysts must demonstrate the nature and existence of conflict, whilst recognising those issues which may appear to prevent the recognition of common interests. This chapter has shown how a number of authors attempted to do this (Rex; Lambert et al 1975; Szelenyi, 1983 for example).

Saunders argued in his property class thesis that housing class conflict arises not from the factors indicated above but, rather, from the material benefits which derive from owner-occupation. He provides an insight into the way that his three property classes relate to each other but this remains unexplored. However, in concentrating upon the economic bases for conflict he tends to ignore factors which promote action from non-economic bases, as Gray argued owner-occupation is not only a financial asset. Further, Saunders fails to investigate

the interests which promote conflict outside the private sector. The role of the voluntary sector and other forms of provision outside his two tenure dichotomy remain undeveloped.

In response to the housing/property classes theses Barlow and Duncan (1988) argued that there is no autonomous tenure effect. In their view, there may be tenure related influences at the bases of conflict, but these 'are almost indissolubly mixed up in various social organisational and political relations' which vary spatially and temporally (Barlow and Duncan, 1988: 223). They argue that 'where there has been direct political action based on housing position, this seems to have been aimed as much at housing providers as at other sorts of housing consumer' (Barlow and Duncan, 1988: 223). Moreover, housing action groups

... develop around the material basis of tenurial relations, ie from relations of occupancy and ownership and not from 'tenure' as a general social category, and secondly they are (partially for this reason) indissolubly bound up with the wider class and status relations in general which are also expressed in rather particular ways in particular times and places. "Tenure" has no general effect (p223).

Barlow and Duncan's critique of the housing /property classes models demonstrates the importance of including suppliers in a theory which seeks to explain movements arising from the distribution of housing and management of the urban environment. The concept of suppliers must,

however, be wider than that conceptualised by Saunders. Since his schema was concerned with defining dominant classes in terms of material interests involved in supplying housing for profit (Saunders, 1978: 1983), voluntary forms of supply were excluded, for example.

In the chapters which follow I demonstrate the importance of including suppliers in the analysis; the material bases of tenurial relations, the relations of occupancy (Barlow and Duncan, 1988) and the importance of neighbourhood use value as the interests around which residents' and tenants' actions are organised. The thesis aims to explore the relations between such dominant authorities and residents' groups. It is argued that often these are currently organised through 'participation' arrangements where possibilities exist for tenants to influence agendas, although the dangers of resident/tenant co-option and incorporation remain. In the contemporary period it is argued that participation mechanisms are an important factor which may lessen the likelihood of conscious housing groups emerging from tenurial relations. It is recognised that participation relationships are complex and dynamic; they illustrate something of the contemporary nature of power in localities; and they hold significance for those attempting to theorise struggles in the consumption sector, as well as raising problems for tenant activists.

Chapter Three Researching Housing Classes
and Housing Action Groups: some issues in Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to show how the theoretical issues associated with 'housing class consciousness', housing action group mobilisation, and their relations with 'dominant authorities', as outlined in the previous chapter, were researched. A hypothesis may be framed as follows: 'conflicts over the ownership and control of urban resources are an important aspect of contemporary urban politics but manifest activity is contingent upon specific identifiable conditions'. As a prerequisite to examining these issues in the empirical work which follows, this chapter looks firstly at the relationship between data and theory; the technical aspects of data collection are then examined and the most appropriate methods for collecting the data needed to address the theoretical questions are evaluated. The final part of the chapter is concerned with the experience of collecting these data.

In investigating the issues pertinent to this hypothesis I was concerned to evaluate the usefulness of Rex's idea of housing class consciousness since it appeared particularly useful for locating contingency centrally in the analysis. The interests which promote consciousness and conflict, and the factors which inhibit their development therefore form an important part of the theoretical work. The existence of consciousness and conflict must, however, be demonstrated rather than

assumed, for reasons which have been discussed in the previous chapter. I aimed to discover why housing groups take action in the contemporary period and the extent to which the housing/property class thesis was helpful in understanding this process. I was further concerned to examine the extent to which tenure had an impact upon community action when it was made up of more than one tenure group, and the relations between so called property classes in Merseyside.

In this research I argue that material interests form a basis for conflict, although Barlow and Duncan's assertions are reflected to a greater extent than Saunders'. I sought to challenge and extend Saunders' thesis concerning the ownership and control of domestic property and urban resources (which emphasises the accumulative importance of private property) with data gained from the voluntary sector, which is not considered in Saunders' analysis. Towards this end the interests of suppliers of housing, especially in the voluntary sector, are investigated together with their relations with tenants' groups. Participation mechanisms which have been established in a number of social policy areas (especially in voluntary and public housing) to bring together groups which can be identified as being in potential conflict, were examined in this context as well as in reference to the promotion and management of conflict in the local arena.

In focusing upon these theoretical issues it seemed clear that the data required to address them were bound up with discovering the nature and range of housing based/community located groups in Merseyside; their main concerns at the time of the research and at other times; who is involved in these organisations and why; the origins of associations and their aims and objectives; their activities, the nature of their action and strategies; the main problems faced by these organisations and where these are perceived to come from; how housing or community groups have been promoted and by whom; the relationships of these groups with what might be considered the dominant authorities such as the major landlord in the area, the local authority, the housing department or central government department, or other agency, depending on the nature of action being pursued.

In researching these questions I follow Saunders' observation that

theory and empirical work.... have to be understood in terms of a dialectical relationship with one another. Empirical research, in other words, is dependent upon theory, but is also itself should be expected to contribute to theory (Saunders, 1979: 207 in Saunders, 1982: 184).

The relationship between theory and data, and especially the impact of the former on the latter, is well rehearsed in text books dealing with methodological issues. The way that data works on theory is not so commonly argued but Merton's (1970) paper provides a basic outline of the main

ways that empirical work relates to theoretical postulations. In his view empirical research performs at least four functions in the development of theory: (1) the *initiation of theory*, (2) the *reformulation of theory*, (3) the *refocussing of theoretical interest*, and (4) in the *clarification of theoretical concepts* (Merton, 1970: 15). I am primarily concerned with three of these four functions. The first refers to what Merton termed the *initiation of theory*, despite beginning with an established theory. Merton suggested that it is not uncommon for research findings to give rise to new social theory. Unexpected observations, notable and surprising because they are inconsistent with prevailing theories or established facts, have an important bearing upon generalised theory and give rise to new social theory (Merton, 1970). The second is summarised by Merton as 'recasting theory': the discovery of a variable which has not been systematically included in a scheme of analysis and demands a reformulation of the thesis (such as the attempt to extend the theory by investigating and theorising the role of the voluntary sector, not included in the work of Rex and Moore and Peter Saunders). The conceptual scheme is, as a result, extended. Finally, Merton's point about the way that the process of empirical research leads to the clarification of theoretical concepts is pertinent to any discussion of the relationship between data and theory. Indeed, he argued that 'a good part of the work called "theorising" is taken up with the

clarification of concepts - and rightly so' (Merton, 1970: 24). Research which is sensitive to its own needs cannot avoid this pressure for conceptual clarification (Merton, 1970). 'For a basic requirement of research is that the concepts, the variables, be defined with sufficient clarity to enable the research to proceed...' (Merton, 1970: 25). Empirical work requires the clarification of concepts which may not be raised simply by theoretical work. For example, if we return to the hypothesis we may ask: What is meant by conflict? What would be an appropriate indicator of such conflict? How important is this conflict to contemporary urban politics? Indeed, what do we mean by urban politics? What can we take as illustrative of manifest activity? What are the contingent conditions?

Merton also drew attention to the way that empirical work can lead to the *refocussing of theoretical interest* but this is less relevant to this study since Merton was referring to the way the discovery of new research procedures can result in the redirection of theoretical attention. Merton (1970) further suggested that empirical work may well impact upon theory in ways additional to these.

Becker, in his discussion of *Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation* (1970), also indicated some of the ways that data works on theory in his examination of the relationships between these methods,

data analysis and theorising. He noted that while participant observation methods can be used to 'test' theory, this is not typical. Rather, sociologists strive for theoretically meaningful research but expect theories to be discovered during the course of research. Becker (1970) drew attention to the way that in the process of gathering the vast data produced using participant observation, a significant amount of analysis and theorising is undertaken. Researchers 'speculate for possibilities' and in doing so formulate provisional theories, which may be discarded later (Becker, 1970 :208 see also Burgess, 1982d). From this point problems of evidence used to support and pursue these hypotheses or refute and abandon them become increasingly important. 'Problems of evidence' might be associated with the credibility of informants (including the types of evaluation required in the context of volunteered statements, and those made in a group context and in the presence of the researcher for example, Becker, 1970). Becker suggested that the frequency and distribution of the phenomena under study will then determine the extent to which a research problem will be pursued. Becker (1970) drew attention to the way that field researchers may sketch tentative conclusions in the form of statements about a set of complicated inter-relationships among many variables in order to build up a model of the social system or organisation under study. This process is essentially one of theorising (see also Burgess, 1982d). Becker (1970)

suggested that the most common types of conclusions include:-

(1) Complex statements of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of some phenomenon.

(2) The statement that some phenomenon is an 'important' or 'basic' element in the organisation; exercising a pertinent and continuing influence on diverse events.

(3) Statements identifying a situation in an instance of some process or phenomenon described more abstractly in sociological theory. Theories posit relations between many abstractly defined phenomena; and conclusions of this kind imply that relationships posited in generalized form hold in this particular instance (Becker, 1970: 212).

Researchers forward the research by refining the model in order to take account of evidence which does not fit earlier formulations. Searches are made for alternative hypotheses and negative cases. Becker noted that observers may indicate the kinds of evidence which would be likely to support or challenge the model and should actively pursue such evidence. Here we can see the inter-relationships between data and theory very clearly, especially regarding the way that qualitative methods work on theory. Becker also notes differences in the relationship between data and theory which derive from the extent to which a researcher has a working hypothesis at the onset of fieldwork or not. He observed positive and negative implications in relation to each way of working. Beginning with a theory means that a deliberate search for negative cases is possible. The following section examines the technical aspects of data collection and identifies the most appropriate methods for

collecting the data needed to address the theoretical questions, and facilitate the search for negative cases, as outlined above.

In his discussion of *Methodological Problems of Field Research* Zelditch suggested that there are two main criteria for judging the 'goodness' of a procedure used for gathering data (1970: 250). Firstly, 'informational adequacy, meaning accuracy, precision, and completeness of data'; and secondly, 'efficiency meaning cost per added input of information' (Zelditch, 1970: 250). In some cases the methods chosen by researchers are arrived at straightforwardly. In other research the reasons for choosing certain techniques over others are not obvious. Generally text books indicate that some generalisations can be made. For example, if the researcher is interested in describing a population, making generalisations, and commenting on frequency distributions, then sample surveys are efficient and adequate methods. But should a researcher desire data about phenomena and behaviours considered to be 'natural', to the extent that it may not be described, or if a researcher wanted to study the dynamics of behaviour in an organisation or social institution, then qualitative methods will be more appropriate (Zelditch, 1970). The type of qualitative method will be determined by the type of data the researcher is aiming to generate. We may find clues indicating the most efficient and adequate methods for

gathering data in the work of writers who have worked in similar areas.

A number of writers working in related areas have preferred not to use quantitative, sample survey, methods of data collection. Saunders (1983), in his study of Croydon, rejected the use of questionnaires in his empirical work because they were likely to be too 'cumbersome and obstructive' (Saunders, 1983: 336). Saunders reflected that the value of questionnaires was limited by two important factors, first by the issue of what to ask, because a pilot study indicated that this was by no means clear. Secondly, and more importantly, since his study aimed to examine urban politics and, therefore, the way 'power' was distributed in Croydon, the use of questionnaires appeared to be of little value. The most important advantage of questionnaires can be argued to be the quantifiable data generated, however, since power cannot be measured, quantification is not applicable. In Chapter Two, the problems of using questionnaires in the study of housing preferences were noted (see Rex, 1971). Rex questioned the significance of findings gained through this method. Rex argued that people express only those preferences which are realistic and those which are guided through cultural conditioning. My aim was to gather data which was akin to collective 'life histories' of tenants' and residents' groups in Merseyside. It seemed, therefore, that the most efficient and appropriate methods of data

collection would not be those commonly associated with sample surveys.

In his discussion of the transition from housing classes-in-themselves to housing classes-for-themselves Rex (1971) argued that, minimally, this must involve

the development of organisational means, the affiliation of individuals to organisations as officers, members, clients and supporters, the development of social norms, values and sentiments shared between members of the class and a degree of consciousness of kind (Rex, 1971: 298).

If this position is accepted, the task becomes one of finding the most relevant and efficient methods for identifying the development of 'organisational means', discovering the common interests which promote association, and investigating the way that these groups and organisations relate to other associations and organisations.

Because the development of organisational means, shared sentiments and values occur through a group context it appeared appropriate to use methods which could encompass group, rather than individual, concerns. But which research methods can? 'Unobtrusive measures' such as documentary sources: minutes of meetings, council or other organisational yearbooks, newspaper reports and so on, are argued to be of only limited value (Saunders, 1983). These sources do constitute a significant part of research of this type, especially in relation to powerful groups where

access to other forms of information can be more limited, but as Saunders (1983) has emphasised 'they are the "concrete" manifestations of a prior process of social construction in which "facts" have been created within a common-sense framework of interpretation' (Saunders, 1983: 347). Secondly, data are arranged according to priorities other than those of the researcher, and may not contain much usable information at all (Saunders, 1983). In minuted meetings, for example, there is often agreement about accepting previous minutes as a 'true record' (allowing for minor corrections), however, they are unlikely to convey the debate or conflict which preceded a decision or its notation. The practice of holding 'pre-meetings' is also widespread. As a result, decisions are made, conflicts smoothed over, and positions are reached before the meeting proper. Access to information about the proceedings of pre-meetings, particularly using unobtrusive measures, may be difficult. This is not to say that the study of such material, as an issue in itself, is unworthy. On the contrary. However, on their own, the contribution of unobtrusive measures to the research project as a whole is limited.

Accepting that interviews can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from the highly structured types used for quantitative purposes to the more unstructured kind which are of a more 'conversational' nature (Burgess, 1982c), some writers have found that interviews were inappropriate

for research with housing consumers. In Chapter Two, for example, it was noted that Lambert and Filkin (1971b) preferred not to use interviews in their study, *Ethnic Choice and Preference in Housing*. Lambert and Filkin believed that respondents would scale down their aspirations to what was possible. Using Zelditch's (1970) criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of different methods cited above, it is evident that Lambert and Filkin regarded interviews as being 'informationally inadequate'.

Saunders (1983), on the other hand, found the use of unstructured interviews a very significant part, of his data gathering process. But he observed that one disadvantage of this method was its tendency to produce a rather formalised impression of events and activities (Saunders, 1983: 348). Other technical difficulties identified in Saunders' work involve the way that interviewees only need tell the researcher what they wish to impart. We may also note that interviews can often result in 'snapshots' of events where time and perceptions become distorted as they are re-interpreted and presented to the researcher. Some of these problems were reflected in an interview I conducted with the Chair of the Peel Road Community and Residents' Association and the local community worker in March 1992. Briefly, this association had been highly active in monitoring and campaigning against coal dust pollution in their neighbourhood, which was argued to be caused by the import of coal from South

America to Bootle and its subsequent transportation out of the docklands. This association was involved in a public inquiry into this issue at the time of the interview. The 'coal dust affair' was a highly emotive, central and immediate concern for this association. The Chair spoke of the way that the dust resulted in 'horribly high' levels of asthma among local school children and about the poor quality of life for local people, reflected in the inability of local people to hang out their washing for example. During the interview, which was largely unstructured, I aimed to discover the issues around which the association had taken action. I asked the chair to indicate to me some of the main issues the association had been concerned with over the past year; leading the discussion to talk about other issues and events that Peel Road had been involved in prior to this. Throughout the interview the chair was very anxious to talk about the coal dust affair and the monitoring role of the residents' association, to the extent that it was difficult to bring other matters into the picture. The coal dust affair was of the utmost importance at that time to the association. Its immediacy meant that other campaigns tended to be excluded from the discussion. I later discovered these to be many and various over the history of the association. After the interview, in conversation, the chair raised some of what he considered to be less important events which had occurred in the past, although at the time they were considered extremely important. This interview illustrated

how time scales and perceptions of events can become distorted in interviews. It also indicates the way that one is presented with a snapshot of the life of the association. I am not arguing that the observation of an association, or series of associations, over a greater length of time would be anything other than a snapshot, but it would indicate something of the process of taking action, the timescales involved and the taken for granted aspects of this process which may be lost with the interview technique.

There are many different types of interviews, of course. The above example indicates the importance of 'conversations as unstructured interviews' (Burgess, 1982c: 107). Technically speaking, this procedure is attractive because it creates the opportunity to 'probe deeply, uncover new clues, accurate, inclusive accounts from informants based on personal experience' (Palmer, 1928 cited in Burgess, 1982c: 107). In particular they allow informants to take the subject of discussion in whichever way they prefer. Although this method demands that the researcher undergoes detailed preparation in order to understand the terms which may be used; that the researcher listens carefully (Burgess, 1982c); can keep the conversation on a relevant topic; and is able to recall the information to record in field notes later. Problems associated with the technique include the issue of comparability and ethical concerns. The credibility of

informants and the 'truthfulness' of the information need also to be assessed. I will return to some of these issues later in the chapter.

It seems clear that, technically speaking, the use of unstructured interviews is a useful way of pursuing the data required to address the theoretical concerns outlined earlier in this chapter. Because the thesis is concerned with group activities, however, it was important to be able to grasp this aspect in the type of technique used for data collection.

In his discussion of group interviews Burgess (1982c) suggested that these have the advantage of 'allowing informants to discuss their world and to argue over the situations in which they are involved. These interviews may afford glimpses of competing views and how consensus or difference is arrived at' (Burgess, 1982c: 109). The method is accompanied by a number of technical difficulties such as the possibility that members of groups will raise only those issues which can be stated publicly, and that the data generated from the questions posed may be difficult to compare. Nevertheless, Burgess (1982c) recognised that the dynamics of social relationships between informants can be discovered through the use of this method. Technically speaking, it seems that this method would be able to generate the data needed to address my research questions. It is able to encompass the group

nature of the project: that the decision to take action and mobilisation are group enterprises.

As Burgess (1982c) has indicated, however, interviews as conversations require that the researcher already has a knowledge of the issues to be discussed. It may be argued that the use of observation methods would be useful towards building such a knowledge. Saunders (1983) gave some consideration to participant-observation as a way of investigating political power in the urban environment, but argued that it has many drawbacks which can result in data which fails to justify the enormous amount of time and effort required when using this method. Briefly, then, Saunders considered participant observation methods to be inefficient. There are considerable problems associated with 'participant-observation techniques'¹³ which, as Saunders (1983) argued, may be magnified because of the political nature of the research question. Problems of this method may include: the task of analysing the vast quantity of data, problems of evidence such as the credibility of informants and the impact of the researcher's presence (Becker, 1970), the problem of ethics, the inevitably partial picture, dependency on sponsors, uneven access, and problems of

¹³ I follow Bell and Newby's argument 'that "participant observation" is not a single technique but is rather variable depending on the social situation' (Bell and Newby, 1971: 65), and Burgess's observation that there is no simple dichotomy between observer and participant (Burgess, 1984).

over-identification, for example (Burgess, 1982a; Gans, 1982; Jarvie, 1982). Yet, observation methods can promote a deeper understanding of the issues from the point of view of the respondents than may be the case with interviews for example. The *changing* perceptions of respondents to the situations which faced them as individuals or groups and over time would be able to be recorded - not simply as snapshots which can be the case with interviews. Links built with groups can lead to introductions and meetings with significant other groups or individuals. Follow up work can be easier than that occurring after the use of other methods. In this way participant observation can be pivotal to the 'snowball' method of research projects. It seems, as a result of these advantages, that participant observation techniques can fulfil informational adequacy criteria, although its efficiency must be evaluated in the light of the extent to which usable data is produced.

The ability to gather data using participant observation, and judgements about informational adequacy and the efficiency of the technique, are necessarily bound up with the ability to take on a role and gain access to those areas of social life that a researcher wishes to study (Burgess, 1982a). Logically, the first issue raised by the question of access is the problem of identification (Saunders, 1983). How do we identify likely groups and individuals who may be approached for interview or observation? Unlike some other studies in social science

no sampling frame is available. A complete list of tenants' and residents' groups operating in contemporary Merseyside does not exist. One cannot achieve a representative sample of tenants' groups. It would also be necessary to have a definition of what a tenants' group or community association is, or consists of, as a prerequisite to this. However, as the research developed the fact that tenants' and community groups are so spatially and temporally variable in their constitution became evermore apparent. Moreover, since one of the aims of the study was to examine the ways in which groups mobilise and find difficulty in mobilising to further their interests, it was important to focus on a range of tenants' and community groups, rather than be preoccupied with the impossible task of completeness.

Through the snowball method a number of tenants' and community groups were contacted, some of which were highly active in their localities and within the city, others which were considerably less so. This method has a tendency towards unevenness built into it as the more active associations demand the most attention. Yet attention has to be maintained on the more latent organisations because a relatively 'dormant' organisation can become active in a relatively short period of time (which can make this type of field research very time consuming). Tenants' groups are not simply active or inactive but rather go through cycles of latency and

manifest activity over time. Ten community and tenants' groups were observed during the fieldwork period. Because some associations were more active than others, especially those which established themselves during this period, they had more research energy focused upon them.

Although 'sampling' is commonly associated with survey research, as Burgess (1982b) argued, it is an essential part of field research. Sampling, in this respect, refers to *where* to observe, *when* to observe and *what* to observe. Researchers are, therefore, interested in the selection of research sites, the times when observations will take place, and the people and events to be studied. These decisions will each have an important effect on the data (Burgess, 1982b), and its completeness as well as on the efficiency with which the research task is undertaken. Having identified 'what' is to be observed, namely a range of tenants' and residents' groups, it is necessary now to consider other aspects of sampling albeit in a slightly wider sense. Since the issue of 'where' and 'when' at the micro level of each tenants' or residents' group will to a large extent be determined by each particular group (when and where they decide to meet or hold public meetings) other, wider, issues of time and place are equally important for the data and require consideration.

In locating the study in Merseyside limits may be placed on the type and number of generalisations which can

be made from the data. It was noted in the previous chapter that Rex and Moore (1967) acknowledged that there may be problems regarding the general applicability of their theory as a result of differing social, economic and political processes operating in cities other than Birmingham. Similar observations may be made of this study. However, it could equally be argued that all cities are in some senses unique despite their setting in an advanced capitalist urban society. Merseyside has a social, economic and political history which may differ markedly to that of other cities, and observations made here cannot be held to be generally applicable. However, these can help to formulate hypotheses for studies elsewhere.

By locating the study in Merseyside there are clearly important implications for the data. A study located in the city and its hinterland, given Liverpool's particular housing system and structure of tenure for example, does offer some interesting insights which may help to frame future hypotheses. The housing association sector accounted for more than 10.5% of Liverpool's stock at the onset of the fieldwork period. On the national level housing associations accounted for between 2 and 3% of stock at the end of the 1980s, although they are set to become the major providers of social housing, as the role of the local authority is effectively curtailed. The large voluntary sector stock (housing associations and

co-operatives) as well as other provision such as that transferred to the Liverpool Housing Action Trust, provides the researcher with interesting ideas about what may occur elsewhere should the current policy of promoting housing provision managed by organisations other than the local authority continue. While this may place limits upon the kind and number of generalisations which can be made from the data, it was partially because of these features that Merseyside was so attractive as the locality for the study, partially also for geographical convenience.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the study is concerned with a very specific time and policy context, one which can be summed up in housing terms with reference to central government's promotion of local authorities as 'enablers'. Enabling refers to the 'range of activities that makes possible or facilitates the provision of social housing opportunities by bodies other than local authorities themselves' (Bramley, 1993: 128). It is not *local authority provision* (Bramley, 1993) [my emphasis]. Similar trends are observed in other areas of current social (and economic) policy. While the promotion of provision outside the traditional public and private sectors has been a significant feature of the Merseyside (notably Liverpool) structure of tenure from the mid 1970s in particular, it is noticeable that until 1980 this promotion was accompanied by continued support for local authority provision. The present system of local

governance, the mode and distribution of urban resources, is a very distinctive feature of the modern city and one which is very specific to a particular time period - and one which is still evolving.

The issue of temporal specificity is therefore important in studies concerned with community politics for a number of reasons. It is also important, in this context, to acknowledge that even within narrow time periods social change does take place. As Bell and Newby (1971) pointed out, studies of this nature often suffer (as well as benefit) from using 'the tools of classical social anthropology' in that they can often lack historical perspective (Bell and Newby, 1971: 63). Writers present their findings 'as if it all happened on the same day', they do not describe social change and they fail to acknowledge that in advanced capitalist societies communities often have written histories concerning the period before the researcher went there (Bell and Newby, 1971: 79). These observations also illustrate the importance of keeping a detailed fieldwork diary which can take account of these aspects.

The fieldwork diary was an invaluable research tool, used to reflect on the data both during and after the fieldwork period. Here I documented where, when, what and of whom observations were made. I also commented on the ideas of other writers, noted my own early ideas and their

abandonment during the fieldwork period. As Burgess (1982d) commented 'the recording of field data raises questions about the relationships between data collection, formal and informal theorising, data analysis and the final research report' (1982d: 191). Note-taking is central to the research process, an integral part of analysis and theorising as questions are posed during the course of research. Reading one's fieldwork diary provides indications of themes to be explored and some theoretical criteria is used to decide what to record and what to leave out (Burgess, 1982d). Burgess suggested that the ways in which field notes are recorded, in practice, will depend upon individual researchers, the research context, the objectives of the research and relationships with informants. It is to some of these issues: 'practicalities' of research, issues associated with the experience of the field, the research context, relationships with informants and ethics that I now turn.

As in Peter Saunders' (1983) study, I found the use of unstructured interviews a significant part of the data gathering process. Unstructured interviews were of particular value once a relationship had been built up with respondents through my role as observer. In these circumstances the often cited tendency to receive a 'stock' answer to a 'stock' question was reduced, respondents were far more willing to talk freely, not simply informing the researcher of what they think you want to hear, or simply

presenting the desirable public image. Moreover, because other methods were used, a strong dialogue was built between myself and the informants, facilitating follow up interviews and discussions. Responses to particular issues could be checked and, more importantly, some of the questions I started out with at the beginning of the research project were revised or abandoned quite early in the fieldwork period (Burgess, 1982f; 1982d; Becker, 1970). But, like Saunders, I found that interviews tended to result in rather formalised impression of an associations' activities.

To the extent that any generalisations can be made it did appear to be the case that interviews with tenants and community activists were different from those with people in 'positions of power'. This was partly the result of getting to know the tenant and community activists to a much greater degree. The ability to build up a dialogue with people in what the tenants and residents considered to be the powerful organisations was more limited. This, of course, does have implications for the reliability of the data generated by these interviews. Here we are also raising the issue of access which will be dealt with later in the chapter, and epistemological issues which must be resolved briefly here. In suggesting that there are people who occupy 'positions of power' I follow Saunders (1983) in that I am not arguing for an epistemology where power could be argued to have a locality and, given the correct

methods, could be discovered. Rather, people were identified who, plausibly, could be argued to hold positions of potential power. Some people, one could argue, on the basis of issue-outcome analysis, did hold influence, others seemed to have rather less. However, the sample was not fixed. Instead it was allowed to snowball as respondents introduced me to other potential informants. Furthermore, since the aim of the research project was to examine the nature and activities of housing and community action groups it was of primary importance to try to understand where housing and community groups understood 'power' to be, their perceptions of the powerful groups with whom they were in actual or potential conflict. 'Reputational' approaches are of little value when attempting to discover where power *really* lies¹⁴. But community and housing groups do mobilise in accordance with their perceptions of where power lies (Saunders, 1983). Given this, and the fact that samples of this kind can rarely be complete, reservations about the reliability of the data gained from these 'powerful' sources are less important for its use was found in guiding the research.

It may be appropriate to quantify the number of interviews carried out in and around Merseyside during the fieldwork period, from October 1991 to July 1993, and in

¹⁴ As the community power writers like Hunter's (1953) critics argued (Saunders, 1983). See also Bell and Newby (1971) for a review of the debate surrounding 'community power'.

its most concentrated form in the eight months between October 1991 and May 1992. If we accept that a definition of an 'interview' is a necessary prerequisite for counting the number which were held, then I am in some difficulty. At the least an interview must be the arrangement of a meeting with a person or number of people for the exchange of information for a specific purpose, in this instance for the purpose of obtaining information relevant to my research project. Some of the unstructured interviews were arranged in this manner. It was also common for respondents to be invited to discuss some of the issues raised in a meeting which had taken place earlier on a more informal level (see Burgess, 1982c). It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between formal interviews and informal interviews, discussions and conversations. The latter are many and are recorded as part of the fieldwork diary and notes. The formal interviews are less in number (13) and are considered to be of rather less value than the informal ones. Through observation techniques respondents were approached and discussions held in an informal manner. Indeed, I increasingly found that the observation based work was yielding very interesting data.

Despite the problems associated with participant observation techniques, outlined above, which we may summarise here as the problem of ethics, the inevitably partial picture, dependency on sponsors, credibility of informants, uneven access, the problems of

over-identification and the impact of the researcher's presence on the data, I found that observation methods produced invaluable data. They meant that follow up work could be organised and carried out relatively easily, as indicated earlier. A deeper understanding of the issues from the point of view of the respondents was gained than I believe would have been the case with interviews continuing to be used as the main source of data collection. The *changing* perceptions of respondents to the situations which faced them as individuals or groups and over time were recorded and the links between groups led to introductions and meetings with significant other groups or individuals. Participant observation was crucial to the snowball effect of the research project and the snowball effect was fundamental to its development. Immersion in the life of a tenants' association, the growth of trust between myself as observer and tenants' groups resulted in pre-meetings and informal discussions being open to my attendance. Tenants would often inform me of developments affecting the group and individuals within them without information being solicited on my behalf. I would not argue that a full picture was gained as a result of these techniques. Long term, highly active, members of groups and organisations indicated that, for them, the picture is rarely complete but is, rather, one which is constructed and reconstructed. Participant-observation seemed to allow a greater insight into the way the picture was painted, than that offered by other methods.

The problem of ethics must, however, be acknowledged. Despite the guidelines for professional conduct (issued by organisations like the British Sociological Association) and the numerous text books on sociological method, the issue of ethics in participant observation is not easily resolved (Burgess, 1982a). The ethical ideal to inform all individuals of the research project, for example, is complicated in the field. As Burgess (1984) observed, there is a tendency to posit overt and covert research as alternatives which, in practice, is unsustainable. It is impossible for all individuals to know, understand and anticipate their roles in the research project in exactly the same way as other respondents and the researcher, despite efforts to present the research in a meaningful way to respondents. At the very least, the researcher has relatively little control over the way individuals interpret such information. To take the argument further, consider the case of a researcher who is accepted as an observer by a group who voted on the issue in the researcher's absence. What if the vote was not unanimous? How can we uphold a professional ethic of allowing the right of all respondents to decline to participate? In this sense, I follow Roth (1962) that it is not possible to tell the researched 'everything' and that in public settings it is impossible to indicate to all the participants that research is being conducted (cited in Burgess, 1982a: 46). The problem associated with seeing covert and overt participant observation as clear cut

alternatives is seen in instances where some details of the research project are left out to avoid disrupting the research process or because one has good reason to believe that full disclosure will result in a significant change of behaviour. Here there is no intention to deceive the respondents but the ethics of the situation may be questionable to some commentators. To illustrate, a situation arose during the fieldwork when representatives from the Canning Area Action Group (CAAG) were to attend a meeting with some of the City Challenge executives concerning their bid for funding a community worker in the Canning Area. CAAG representatives invited me to attend the meeting as an observer. My interest lay in the relationship between the community group and the representatives from this central government agency, and the way that this relationship was being conducted¹⁵. I anticipated that this meeting would give important indications regarding the nature of their relationship although no definitive findings would result from this meeting alone. I did not disclose my role as a researcher to the City Challenge representatives. To have done so, I felt, would have disturbed the development of the meeting and disrupted the research process by causing, most probably, in a change in behaviour of these participants.

As a participant-observer the dependency relationship with sponsors is also a problem which is not easily

¹⁵ This is discussed in Chapter Five.

addressed. I was aware of being more or less dependent upon sponsors to gain and maintain access to certain groups and areas of social life which could have been very difficult indeed otherwise. That access can also be closed off by sponsors was also a concern, together with the fact that dependency on sponsors can promote movement from observer to participant, despite intentions to the contrary. It was fairly common to be asked 'What do you think?' during the discussion of an agenda item in a meeting where I had been invited to 'observe'. I am not arguing that participation is not occurring in any case, but to respond to such a question can mean influencing the data itself. The pressure to do so can be very strong, especially once a relationship has been built up with a sponsor (who believes for one reason or another that, as researchers, we have a particular set of skills or knowledge base) and it can also be the case that the sponsor has an expectation that the researcher will give support to their argument.

One may feel compelled to intervene for a number of reasons (see also Gans, 1982). For example at a meeting of the Central Tenants' Association (MIH tenants) in February 1992 the tenant participation (TP) worker suggested that in the next series of training sessions the group may want to look at HIV and AIDS and why it is a housing issue. Attempts were made to demonstrate that HIV was a concern which ought to be addressed by housing associations and

tenants, but some of the tenants in attendance remained unconvinced. One member of the committee strenuously argued that he saw HIV as arising out of 'deviant relationships' and that if he knew of such people who were suffering from the virus as a result of such a relationship he would have little sympathy. The tenant participation worker was very shocked but visibly tried to control this in an attempt to demonstrate that the kind of belief which was expressed here was an often cited myth. The tenant committee member then retorted that the TP worker was suggesting he was ignorant. In this situation I felt the need to intervene, to support the tenant participation worker's argument and to defuse the situation. I did intervene but not without misgivings. In instances such as this, I follow Bell and Newby (1971) who suggested that researchers should report their interventions and on their activities as an actor because the field of study has, as a result, been altered. There may be some advantages for the data in the sense that new insights may be gained into the social processes under observation as a result of an intervention, but new difficulties arise in the form of reduced levels of observation (Bell and Newby, 1971), although I am not convinced that this is always the case. The issue of intervention raises another important issue, that of being perceived as being part of an organisation whether this is a tenants' or residents' group or indeed a landlord organisation for example. The danger of being perceived in this way is that it may close off access to

other groups or means of accessing data. Over-identifying with a group may also close off avenues of inquiry which may otherwise be open. The issue of value-freedom and value commitment is also raised in this context and will be dealt with later in the chapter.

In most of the observation work carried out with community or tenants' groups in Merseyside the problem of over-identification did not seem to be an insurmountable problem. The problem of being over-identified was an issue which was considered in detail at the beginning of fieldwork. As I have already indicated, one of the main research questions was to examine the conditions under which housing and community groups would or could mobilise. If people perceived me as a member of a tenants' or community group, who were not themselves members (as happened from time to time) such as representatives of the city council, a landlord or other authoritative body then, on one hand, there seemed to be a beneficial effect for the data. These occasions provided a context in which I was able to observe the way that such bodies relate to community/tenants' groups without my role as a researcher altering the way that this relationship was conducted. On the other hand we return to the ethical problem raised earlier concerning covert observation, although the distinction between overt and covert observation cannot be easily made in practice (Burgess, 1984; Burgess, 1982a).

In September 1991 I received an invitation from the Tenants Participation forum (TPF) at Merseyside Improved Houses¹⁶, to spend three to six months on placement based alongside the TP Officer. The uses to which the placement could be put were entirely open and I regarded this as an opportunity too good to be missed. I spent six months from the beginning of November 1991 investigating the following aims and objectives: Firstly, 'to examine the nature of contemporary tenants' organisations in Merseyside with particular reference to housing association (MIH) tenants. The main concerns of tenants' groups and their mode of organisation will be of particular interest'. Secondly, 'to examine the nature of interaction between associations and tenants' organizations and, indeed, the way tenants may organise in response to local concerns outside the immediate and direct remit of the associations' (field notes). I agreed to report on my evaluation of tenant participation to the TPF after the placement period. Thus I had two core aims, the first referred to my own research concerning the nature of tenants' organisations emerging from the voluntary sector¹⁷; the second referred to the research bargain, to investigate the nature and practice of

¹⁶ MIH is the largest housing association in Merseyside and the fourth largest in Britain.

¹⁷ The voluntary sector is extremely large in Liverpool which makes this a unique feature of the city. MIH had approximately 17,000 properties at the time of the field work, approximately the size of a local authorities' stock, such as in neighbouring St. Helens.

tenant participation in MIH. The two necessarily became very intertwined as the research developed¹⁸.

The techniques I used to carry out this research included observation at tenants' group meetings both at the local and central level (MIH has a decentralised structure), formal and informal interviews with both tenants and 'key workers' (individually and collectively), documentary material and the shadowing of the Tenant Participation Officer. In addition I attended some staff meetings within the organisation. That I may be perceived by a number of tenants' groups as being a worker employed by Merseyside Improved Houses was a danger I recognised before embarking on the placement. I was concerned should I be perceived as part of the landlord organisation when it came to holding discussions with tenants about their groups' relationships with MIH. I felt that this would have adverse effects on the data generated during those discussions. A slightly different but similar situation also arose when carrying out observation work with the High Rise Group, the Liverpool tenants' group representing those in tower blocks facing the Liverpool Housing Action Trust take-over, because all my initial contacts were members of housing association staff¹⁹.

¹⁸ Some of the problems encountered researching tenant participation are discussed in Chapter Six where the findings are considered.

¹⁹ My contacts with the High Rise Group were initially through employees seconded through Merseyside Improved Houses (MIH) and Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT): two out of

In the first instance, all attempts were made to minimise the impact of being perceived as part of MIH's staff. It may be noted that the tenant participation worker at MIH was very well respected by the different tenants' groups she worked with, they trusted her and regarded her as being *their* advocate in the association. I would argue that shadowing this worker had rather fewer problems than I had anticipated. Because I was introduced by the TP Officer I seemed to be accepted more easily than may have been the case otherwise. Secondly, my role as a researcher was always clearly specified at the initial stages of being introduced to new groups. The tenant participation officer became my sponsor, until a dialogue had been built up between myself and tenant representatives. The situation with the High Rise Group was slightly different. Having been introduced to the Group by some of their consultants (Liverpool Housing Trust and MIH employees on secondment to work with the High Rise Group), I was slightly anxious about whether the groups I observed would perceive me as part of these organisations, and, if so, what kind of effect this would have on the data. But, as in the instance cited above, this appeared not to be too much of a problem. The workers employed as consultants appeared to have an excellent rapport with the tenants who seemed to trust them; secondly, their

the four agencies employed by the High Rise Group to provide a consultancy service to local authority tenants in the tower blocks facing the Liverpool Housing Action Trust.

Chairwoman ensured that I was introduced as a researcher to the Group's representatives as and when appropriate. It is worth noting in this context that my concerns were additional to the Group's concern to avoid infiltration by some political factions in the city, especially Militant supporters who were seen as being less than supportive in their aims. In accordance with this it was necessary write to the Chairwoman of the High Rise Group for permission to observe and indicate my political affiliations.

I have raised the issues of access and identification of tenants' groups in an earlier part of this chapter. I now turn to the practical issues associated with gaining access as a field worker. In fact, gaining access, after reading a number of texts on fieldwork, appeared to be surprisingly easy. As I have already indicated, a great deal of interest was placed with the voluntary sector in Merseyside, where both landlords and tenants appeared to be surprisingly open to the prospect of having a research student observing their respective activities. My observations were invited by the two major housing associations, both gave me a great deal of assistance in the study (MIH's specific invitation has already been noted). My contacts with tenants' and community groups spread from my contacts within these housing associations (LHT and MIH), or from tenants who were involved in groups which were connected in some way to the housing associations in the first instance. For example, the

Canning Area Action Group (CAAG) had connections with Canning Area Residents' and Tenants' Association (CARTA) (a tenants' association made up of tenants in Liverpool Housing Trust owned property²⁰), a group I had been working with for quite a while. This is one example of the snowball effect described earlier. If generalisations can be made I would suggest that many tenants' organisations were a little surprised that they attracted academic interest, most were willing to talk to me, partly as a result of being recognised as being important.

It should be added, however, that the ability to gain access and to carry out research in some areas of Merseyside (especially in inner-areas like Liverpool 8) is not always as easy as this generalisation may suggest. Many people expressed a seemingly widespread view that researchers cannot be trusted. According to this view researchers, from the University, Government and elsewhere have come into these areas, carried out research either as a policy orientated or academic exercise, and expectations were raised that improvements would result. Gifford *et al* (1989) noted that Liverpool is 'one of the most reported on cities in the country' (Gifford *et al*, 1989: 19). But, few reports and studies have resulted in visible change for black and other marginalised residents (Gifford *et al*, 1989). There is a view that people build academic or other

²⁰ The second largest housing association in Liverpool.

careers out of their research, they then leave contributing little in return. The people of inner Liverpool are reluctant to open themselves up to research from which, they believe, they will gain little. Closing off research opportunities can also offer some people the power to restrict the activities of people perceived to be from more powerful institutions to which they do not have access.

I found it desirable not only to inform respondents of the nature and content of the research project but also to establish a research bargain of a more involved nature. This may be termed 'action research'; it involved carrying out work for some of the groups on a voluntary basis, such as involvement in the process of carrying out social survey work, the analysis of social survey data, assisting with administrative work or similar activities for example. A great deal of time was, therefore, invested in the research process than might otherwise have been the case. I would emphasise, however, that the research certainly seemed to benefit from this degree of involvement, through the enhanced relationships which developed through this process, and the background information which emerged from carrying out these activities. I am not trying to suggest that a 'full picture' was gained. It is surely the case that only a partial picture can ever be achieved. But I would argue that the picture was perhaps more comprehensive than would otherwise have been the case if action research methods had not been employed.

Gaining access as an action researcher or participant observer demands that one is accepted as an actor or observer, as I have indicated earlier in the chapter. One's own background, status or position can be a benefit or a handicap in seeking to obtain this acceptance (Burgess, 1982a; Gans, 1982; Easterday et al, 1982). Researchers, as Bell and Newby (1971) noted, do need to be categorised by their research community. While there are benefits in having a similar status to the research participants, there are associated problems. A number of writers have discussed the importance of gender divisions on data collection and have drawn attention to the implications of gender for the validity and reliability of data (see Bell and Newby, 1971; Easterday et al, 1982). They point out that the ability of women to collect data on some male activities is almost impossible, and vice versa. The practice of sitting in public places like cafes and pubs as documented by male field workers (see Moore, 1977 for example) can be problematic for women. I also experienced occasions when male respondents appeared 'over-friendly', episodes which were not easy to deal with. I felt uncomfortable in the presence of a particular respondent and avoided contact with him after he began to 'make advances'. This respondent at first seemed a useful informant. Later, and for a short while, I felt that barriers were being erected to my continued work with the group, although I cannot categorically attribute this to my rejection of the respondent. The situation required some

very delicate handling. I would argue that this is a problem which could affect any woman researcher involved in a project of this nature.

It is very difficult to gain access across all the social divisions operating in a community, as Bell and Newby (1971) acknowledged. Certainly in Canning, for example, which was divided along the lines of age, sex, ethnicity, tenure, and economic status, one would be struggling to negotiate access to all these groups. Indeed, the issue of 'race' and the 'right to know' is an issue in research with some members of the Liverpool black community, as it is elsewhere (Solomos, 1989). Few white researchers can claim an understanding of issues faced by this section of the community. Some of the community wide organisations offer a limited insight as community activists put forward their respective perspectives but this can by no means be seen as a complete picture. Furthermore, black people are considerably under-represented in the tenants' and residents' groups examined in this research, mainly because these are located outside the main area of black residence (Granby). The issue of negotiating access across social divisions, however, in the final analysis must limit the study to what is accessible whilst acknowledging that this is not a complete story.

Having discussed some of the problems which were experienced during the fieldwork and how these were addressed, the following section of the chapter examines some of the issues surrounding withdrawal from fieldwork. Before doing so it is important to acknowledge the issue of value-freedom and value-commitment in this research together with the issue of validity.

As many commentators have argued, everyone brings their values and expectations to the field. Furthermore, as Saunders suggested, problems found generally in social science research are likely to be exacerbated in contexts where differential power is an integral part of the research project. 'The problem of values, for example, is likely to arise in particularly acute form when the subject matter of research is itself political' (Saunders, 1983: 327). I do not intend to debate the desirability or otherwise of value-freedom in social science. Rather my concern is with how values and expectations influenced the data gathering process, the writing of field notes and the analysis of the fieldwork data. Clearly values and expectations can impact upon the objectivity of the research and the difficulties associated with 'objectivity' must be acknowledged. Reflection on the data and the pursuit of alternative explanations and theories was the only practical way of moving forward with this issue (see Becker, 1970). Nevertheless, it is not always possible to be self consciously aware of one's own theories and

expectations. Similarly, because this research was dependent upon information from informants and respondents, we need to be aware not only of our own biases and how they may effect the data, but also the way that informants have their own interests which may be reflected in the way that data is transferred to the researcher (Becker, 1970). The search for alternative explanations not a simple task when there is a degree of agreement with the views and explanations being expressed or when the respondent represents 'expert' opinion.

Assessing the validity²¹ of research can be more problematic in a study of this nature than may be the case in other research. For while we may seek to test validity through a comparison with data gained from other sources these may reflect the interests of those compiling them and may be equally invalid. Comparative data may not exist. Checks for validity with colleagues working in the same area were not applicable. We may, as Bell and Newby (1971) suggested, check the data for its internal consistency. However, the use of replication as a tool for assessing its validity is certainly very difficult in studies of this kind because, as these authors suggested, the communities, and indeed the researcher, will have changed since the

²¹ Validity is used in the technical sense as the relation between an indicator and a concept, it is associated with the 'accuracy of the report' (Zelditch, 1970: 250) and is bound up with the idea of being sure that one is measuring what one thinks one is measuring.

first study. Again, this test for validity was not applicable.

In practice, it is important that the indicators which are used to shed light on more difficult to observe phenomena are appropriate to the task. But this is not straightforward in a study of this nature. For example, how might we distinguish between housing action groups which are highly active and those which are less so or 'inactive', what measure do we use? What indicators should a researcher use in order to discover the nature of a tenants' group's relationship with a housing association or local authority, for example. At the time of going into the field I had little idea about what would constitute 'active' tenants' groups, and no worked through ideas concerning the nature of a residents' group's relationship with a landlord or dominant authority. I had some ideas about what 'in-active' means and therefore 'active' would be seen in oppositional terms in the sense that it would be 'doing something'. However, I was wary of defining 'active' too rigidly because it may mean missing something and defining actions out of existence. Short of activities being observable in the sense that pickets were demonstrating outside the Town Hall I had little idea about what to expect. I expected a tenants' group to have interests which could be discovered through interviews and observations and would undertake some action which would be reflected in some form of campaign to further these

interests, but the nature of action and the mode of campaign remained largely unformulated.

This brings the chapter to the point where we may discuss the issue of exiting from fieldwork; withdrawal itself; and some associated problems of analysis and writing up. I raised the point earlier about problems resulting from the way that some field researchers conducted fieldwork in inner-Liverpool. The way researchers leave the field has implications not only for the collective expectations of the people with whom a researcher has contact, but also for other field researchers who follow. Researchers must be aware of the unintended as well as the intended consequences of their activities (see Solomos, 1989: 9). I have tried to be aware of the issues associated with withdrawal from the field, the expectations of the respondents in terms of the way the project is written and could be disseminated, trying to account for different possibilities, and what this may mean for the groups and individuals who have participated. In some cases I have found it most difficult actually to remove myself from the field. Immersion in the life of the Canning Area Residents' and Tenants' Association (CARTA) meant, for example, that it was not easy to stop being so involved, especially after taking on commitments to carry out social survey work which could not be completed to report stage during the concentrated fieldwork period. In addition, such interesting

observations were emerging from continued involvement with this and another group (the Canning Area Action Group in particular) that it became difficult to establish a 'cut off' date. Problems of a delayed withdrawal are associated with the demand upon one's time and the unequal time afforded to these groups in comparison to the other case studies.

Withdrawal from field research has implications for the informants, the researcher and present and future research projects. But the problems do not end with the removal of oneself from the field. I anticipated, before writing up, that the way respondents are presented in the final written form would be relatively straightforward. The professional traditions in sociology provide good guidance. But in practice it is not so simple. As other authors have commented, the convention of ensuring that individuals are not recognisable, and the commitments to confidentiality and anonymity, are rather less easy to maintain than is anticipated (see for example Bell and Newby, 1971). Some individuals are, by their very position in the community social structure, recognisable by those with even a limited knowledge of the community under study. In a community where a limited number of key individuals have an important role in organizing the community, disguising the identity of an individual is very difficult, if not impossible. Changing the names of respondents is not enough in this context. How can one disguise the

identity of an informant without changing the meaning of their roles? Other problems also arise as the work is written up. For example, if this work offends key respondents does this mean that other researchers will have access denied to them? As other writers have pointed out, in studies of power, class and status someone will be displeased with their portrayal (Bell and Newby, 1971).

I have tried to paint a picture of activity in Merseyside which is honest. I trust that those representing organisations, who may find themselves displeased with their portrayal, will not simply reject these findings and arguments. Rather, I hope that they would see this as an opportunity for debate (here I am particularly referring to the discussion of participation arrangements in the later part of the thesis).

Chapter Four

Struggles over occupancy and ownership in Merseyside

The aim of this chapter is to argue the importance of Barlow and Duncan's critique of the housing class and consumption sector models discussed in Chapter Two. The importance of the material bases of tenurial relations, the role of providers, and the contemporary nature of housing provision in the social sector are highlighted. At the same time, the contributions of, and the problems with, applying the housing class analysis to aspects of the contemporary study of housing politics are recognised. I begin by drawing attention to some of the successful community actions around housing in Britain as a whole and in Merseyside in particular. Some tentative conclusions about the nature of these actions are formulated. Lowe's study of mobilisation of tenants in Sheffield is found to be useful in this context (Lowe, 1986) but the special context of the contemporary period remains underdeveloped in his analysis. Following Lowe, changes in the nature of housing consumer strategies in the modern period are noted. I illustrate the new strategies of the contemporary tenants' movement in the Merseyside region with reference to the struggles of the High Rise Group in Liverpool, and the actions of tenants in Runcorn (Cheshire). These studies show how Lowe's concept of mobilisation and discussion of ideology require reformulation in the modern period. Support is found for Barlow and Duncan's (1988) argument that what may seem tenure related influences may

be inseparable from various social, organisational and political relations which vary over time and space.

In Chapter Two it was suggested that Barlow and Duncan offered an interesting and important critique of the use of tenure categories in the housing/property classes models. They argued that viewing tenures as social and political categories is unhelpful. According to these authors housing tenure refers to the relations of occupancy and ownership, but Rex and Saunders used tenure to describe social and political characteristics which go far beyond this. They argued that there is no autonomous tenure effect. There may be tenure related influences but these 'are almost indissolubly mixed up in various social, organisational and political relations' (Barlow and Duncan, 1988: 223). These vary spatially and over time. Furthermore, direct political action, where it has been observed is aimed at housing providers as much as other sorts of housing consumer, and arises from the material base of tenurial relations. These are inextricably linked to wider class and status relations (Barlow and Duncan, 1988).

The danger of regarding tenure divisions as politically significant categories was, of course, recognised by the housing class theorists, such as Saunders in *A Nation of Home Owners* (1990), where it was noted that housing tenure had little impact upon the way people viewed

their class position²². Nevertheless Saunders argued that the ownership (or not) of domestic property, whilst not changing peoples' class position is a major factor in defining their consumption sector interests (Saunders, 1984).

If we accept that tenure is significant for peoples' consumption sector interests what, then, is the likelihood of owner-occupiers, or indeed tenants, taking political action in defence of these interests? It is often argued that council tenants are likely to exhibit greater political unity (than owner-occupiers) because of greater class homogeneity on council estates (see Ball, 1983). But there is no reason why owner-occupiers, given their social class heterogeneity, should act as a political group, even in relation to housing issues according to Ball. Nevertheless, partly as a result of the misidentification of certain ideologies to this tenure, home-ownership is assumed to have particular political effects (Ball, 1983). When writers endow owner-occupation with these inherent characteristics they take owner-occupation out of historical context, attribute to it universal characteristics, and close off enquiry into potential forms of political action which may be otherwise missed along with the potential for alliances with tenants in political action (Ball, 1983). Through the examination of a successful community action in Runcorn alliances between

²² See Chapter Two.

public sector tenants and owner-occupiers are brought into the analysis reflecting not only common interests arising from material concerns but common ideas about the locality's use-value and notions of community. These ideas are discussed further in Chapter Five.

In his discussion of the way certain political ideologies have been attached to owner occupation, Ball looked at the idea that important strata of the working class have become 'incorporated into the dominant ideology of capitalism' (Ball, 1983: 283). He argued that such beliefs are widespread but it is difficult to deduce ideological formation from one particular commodity transaction. Incorporation would have to extend beyond housing issues. This kind of ideology is assumed to result in passivity on political issues, but Ball suggested that to demonstrate passivity on a range of issues would be very difficult. Indeed Ball's evidence, that political quiescence is not a feature of owner-occupation, is also a useful critique of the way writers using this perspective take owner-occupation out of its historical context and endow the tenure with specific and inherent characteristics. Ball (1983) cites the case of the South Wales miners of Mardy, in the Rhondda, in support of his argument. Here were some of the most militant working class groups in the 1920s and 1930s whose support for the Communist Party was so widespread that it was popularly referred to as 'Little Moscow'. Mardy was founded as a

working class mining village at the end of the 19th century, the majority of its housing was owner-occupied (Francis and Smith, 1980 cited in Ball, 1983). The local social base characteristics are seen as more important for determining forms of political action. Here we can also see the value of Barlow and Duncan's point about direct political action being bound up with wider class and status relations in general, which are expressed in particular ways in specific times and places (Barlow and Duncan, 1988: 223).

A selected history of early tenants' struggles

Many writers who study tenants' groups and political action arising from tenure note the difficulties associated with the task. Problems derive from the fact that often little is written by tenants' organisations, and they often go out of existence after taking action - or their form changes dramatically (Lowe, 1986). Working class traditions of oral history are the main way of communicating information concerning events and actions. These are not easily lent to academic analysis (Lowe, 1986). Written records are often missing, incomplete or otherwise insufficient to count as satisfactory evidence. Actions taken by tenants are often ignored in the mass media (Moorhouse et al, 1972) and as a result the mass media are not a good source of evidence about early tenants' struggles. Even when tenants engage in militant

action (eg rent strikes) their actions are viewed as subordinate to those in the industrial sphere (Sklair, 1975). Compare, for example, the actions taken against the 1972 Housing Finance Act with the Industrial Relations Act enacted by the same government (Sklair, 1975). Even where the struggle against the Finance Act was covered in the media it was the councillors, especially in Clay Cross and Clydebank, who received attention, not the tenants undertaking the high risk strategy of rent strike (Sklair, 1975). Nevertheless, the material concerning early tenants' struggles gathered by authors like Lowe (1986), Sklair (1975), Moorhouse *et al* (1972), and others, tend to demonstrate Barlow and Duncan's (1988) point that where direct political action occurs it arises from the material base of tenurial relations (the relations of occupancy and ownership). The most important material interest, historically, has been rent and the most important struggles have been, not surprisingly, over rent increases. Moreover, tenant actions have not been confined to particular tenures. The most celebrated tenants' struggle was, of course, that undertaken by private sector tenants in Glasgow in 1915. A brief description of its features will illustrate some of the contingent factors which resulted in the tenants involved being able to claim a victory over factors (property agents) and government (Moorhouse *et al*, 1972).

The rent strike in Glasgow involved thousands of tenants, mainly women, in a fierce battle against the landlords over rent control. It is believed that landlords sought to take advantage of the fact that there was a scarcity of accommodation (because of the influx of munitions workers) and the fact that men were away fighting in the trenches²³. Several special features combined to result in a successful outcome for the tenants: government intervention in the private sphere of housing to freeze rents and to control prices (Lowe, 1986; Moorhouse et al, 1972). These special features included the fact that the strike was carried out in an occupational community where group associations at work are carried over into the community; people who work together are typically leisure time companions (Moorhouse et al, 1972). The emergent shop stewards movement facilitated linking the rent strike to a threat of industrial action. The political sensitivity of munitions combined with these elements to create advantageous conditions for the strikers (Moorhouse et al, 1972; Lowe, 1986). After the war the government felt it could not risk greeting their returning armies with rent increases, and as a result the controls remained in place (Bowley, 1945 in Lowe, 1986).

Despite the political necessity of maintaining rent controls after the First World War there was, nevertheless,

²³ This, of course, also involves a gender stereotype about the willingness and ability of women to take strike action.

considerable pressure to raise rents (Moorhouse *et al*, 1972). The government reviewed these controls and enacted a decision to raise rents (by not more than 40% during three years extended operation of the Acts). This resulted in another rent strike on the Clyde in 1920 which, although judged to be less successful than the 1915 rent strike (fading out in 1926), resulted in tens of thousands of pounds being saved by tenants in Clydebank which would otherwise have been paid in rent over its six year duration (Moorhouse *et al*, 1972). The rent increases were opposed all along the Clyde, the action involved more than 20,000 withholders in Glasgow and tens of thousands more along the river. In some areas tenants withheld not only the increase but the total rent due. By 1924 arrears in Glasgow amounted to over £1m. But the 'storm centre' was Clydebank where according to the factors, arrears represented 60% of the annual rent due. The burgh's population was 46,000 of which 12,000 were withholding rent. By February 1925 £160,000 was owed in arrears in Clydebank and the factors were lobbying the Secretary of State for Scotland. Favourable court decisions for the tenants meant that nearly £50,000 had been lost. A year later, though, after losing an important court battle where it was decided that tenants would have to pay arrears dating back to the beginning of the strike, the morale of the strikers became weakened and the strike ended (1926). Some commentators (notably *The Times*) argued that the strike was already breaking up as new orders came into the

shipyards resulting in employment, greater prosperity, and a new ability on behalf of tenants to afford the rents demanded. In a similar vein, the factors argued that unemployment caused the arrears, not the action of withholding. It remains the case that the possibility of holding sympathy action in the shipyards was absent before this time because of unemployment. The special feature of Clydebank's occupational community was unable to contribute to this action.

Apart from a strike in East London in 1938-39 there was a lull of activity until the 1960s. Then beginning with the St. Pancras strike of 1960, but not really taking off until the late 1960s, an intense period of tenant activity began across Britain (Lowe, 1986; Moorhouse et al, 1972). During the intervening period rapid expansion of council stock continued. On the new estates tenants' associations were being formed, but their main functions were associated with the process of settling down on the new estates and negotiating with the council authorities about environmental and management problems (Mitchell and Lupton, 1954; Lowe, 1986). But, in the late 1960s tenant action was again reflected in its most militant form - rent strike - on council estates across the country. Tenants were in conflict over the material base of their tenure, rent.

The 1960s saw local authorities seeking to increase rent levels in order to balance their housing revenue account and to reduce debts incurred in their building programmes. Rents in the council sector were to increase to market levels, the poorest families were to be cushioned by a means tested rent rebate scheme (see Lowe, 1986). Widespread opposition was witnessed in many local authorities, but especially in London where 11,000 households went on rent strike in response to the GLC's implementation of the new rent schemes. This action was also notable because threats of industrial action on the docks were made during the course of the strike. Moorhouse *et al* have suggested that there is no way of knowing whether this would have actually taken place, or its effects, but it may have been the case that in the context of an occupational community, a favourable setting was created for successful tenant action. Other actions took place in Glasgow, Sheffield and in many other authorities (Lowe, 1986) including in Liverpool which will be discussed shortly.

The actions of the 1960s resulted in some limited successes (the struggle against the GLC meant a more staged rent increase for example) but did not prevent the restructuring of rent towards market levels and the introduction of means tested rebates (Lowe, 1986). The next wave of tenants' defensive action occurred over

precisely this issue, the 1972 Housing Finance Act (Lowe, 1986).

The 1972 Housing Finance Act was intended to consolidate the move towards market levels of rent and to introduce a rebate scheme similar to the situation found in the late 1960s. More affluent tenants would, under this Act, support the poorest; the Exchequer would cease to have responsibility for providing subsidies to council housing (Sklair, 1975). Sklair's review of *The Struggle Against the Housing Finance Act* describes tenants' action against the Act on a massive scale around the country. While mass media reporting concentrated on Labour councillors refusing to implement the Act (especially in Clay Cross), opposition was reflected in thousands of marches, pickets and meetings which took place and the hundreds of thousands of tenants who took some kind of action, including the withholding of rent.

Opposition to so called 'fair rents' began with the Labour Party, but nationally supported opposition to the Bill soon disintegrated. Non-implementation was not supported by the national Labour Party when the Bill became an Act. Clay Cross is now remembered as the most famous non-implementor, mainly because the council steadfastly refused to co-operate even when a Housing Commissioner was imposed in October 1973. Indeed the Housing Commissioner was even refused a room in the council offices (Sklair,

1975). Less known is the fact that Bedwas and Machen never implemented, but did not prevent the Act from working once Commissioners had been appointed in 1972. Sklair notes that in addition to the opposition to the Act undertaken by these local authorities, Conisborough, Biggleswade and Camden in England; Merthyr in Wales; Clydebank, Cumbernauld, Denny, Saltcoats, Whitburn, Alloa, Barrhead, Midlothian and Cowdenbeath in Scotland held out into 1973. Another 32 authorities (including Liverpool) implemented after October but before 1973. Camden, Merthyr and Clydebank provoked the three strategies which the government had at its disposal to deal with their opposition: the withholding of government subsidies, appointment of a Commissioner; and the use of court action (Sklair, 1975). The significance of councils' non implementation was that, according to Sklair, there was a clear correlation between the existence of a rent strike and whether or not the local authority had implemented in good time. 'It looks almost as if tenants' militancy, as measured by the will to withhold rent, is rather more likely to manifest itself where the council quietly implements than where it puts up a fight' (Sklair, 1975: 268). The significance of this observation is, as Lowe (1986) notes, that tenants will often take the line of least resistance, only resorting to the high risk strategy of rent strike when other channels have been exhausted. Rent strikes reflect the narrow range of strategy options available to tenants (Lowe, 1986). Councillors in

non-implementing authorities risk take over by Commissioners, the prospect of financing deficits from their own funds, and the possibility of disqualification from public office (Sklair, 1975; Lowe, 1986). Rent strikers face threats or actual eviction, the prospect of paying the arrears, and even more financial hardship in the future, court action and sometimes imprisonment are all considerations for tenants undertaking this kind of action. Sklair (1975) observed that the longest lasting rent strike in response to the Act took place in Kirkby (near Liverpool) and in Dudley (near Birmingham). The Kirkby action was considered to be one of the best organised and largest actions taken against the Act, and will be discussed later in the chapter. The Kirkby action offers an insight into the continuity of tenants' struggles within a city-region. It also illustrates a number of other features which are important to the analysis developed later in the chapter. However, it is also interesting, as a prelude, to indicate something of the activity which occurred at the same time in the West of Scotland.

In Scotland the Housing (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act had important implications for tenants occupying property owned by several different types of landlords, according to Sklair (1975). Local authority tenants, the five New Town Development Corporations' tenants, private tenants and the 77,000 tenants of the Scottish Special Housing Association (SSHA) were each to be

affected by the new measures. All tenants were represented in the Scottish Council of Tenants (SCT). As noted above, where local authorities implemented the Act with little delay tenants were apt to organise in resistance. But where non-implementation was a feature of a council's response, and in Clydebank this was clearly the case, the tenants often supported the local authority. Even after the council implemented, and the rents increased, Clydebank tenants did not organise to withhold the increase, but tenants of SSHA withheld with some success (Sklair, 1975).

This short review illustrates the importance of the social base in tenant actions. It shows that particular forms of political action, especially direct action in the form of rent strike, are not confined to particular consumption sectors although they are for the most part struggles between property-owners and propertyless (Moorhouse et al, 1972), and it shows the recurrence of particular struggles in certain city-regions. Furthermore, it illustrates the importance of the local authority's stance on the likelihood of tenants taking defensive action.

Indeed, the history of tenant struggles in a locality is an interesting phenomenon for a number of reasons. According to Sklair 'the influence of previous struggles varies from place to place and, of course, according to the success, failure or otherwise of the struggle' (Sklair,

1975: 269). This author noted that a history of rent strikes has had an effect in many areas of Britain, notably Hackney, Camden, Brent, Stockport, Chadderton, Liverpool and the West of Scotland. In particular, the 1969 rent increase led to a strike in Liverpool lasting six months which succeeded in winning a reduction of 2/6d (Sklair, 1975). Tenants became aware of the possibilities of their action according to one tenant activist in the city, Mrs M Gallimore (Sklair, 1975), a tenant who remains active in contemporary Liverpool. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Sklair, like other writers, makes the analytical distinction between the more socially orientated tenants' associations and issue based associations which arise over particular grievances and which disintegrate after the campaign into either socially orientated groups (see Lowe, 1986) or into virtual oblivion. In the latter case Sklair noted that there may be enough trace of an organisation to draw on as a resource in future campaigns. Indeed, continuity is often provided by local 'politicals', sometimes people brought in as organisers or, on other occasions, people recruited during the activity. The following section sketches some of the documented tenant struggles in the Merseyside region. These actions arose over the material base of tenure, rent increases, and constituted a particularly militant form of tenant action. They form the backdrop against which the present tenants'

movement in Merseyside has developed, drawing on this experience often in a very direct sense in terms of the personnel involved.

Early tenants' struggles in Merseyside

Earlier in the chapter I discussed the famous rent strike in the West of Scotland of 1915. Attention was drawn to the special conditions of war; the political sensitivity of munitions, and the context of an occupational community as factors which promoted the possibility of linking the tenants' struggle to action in the industrial sphere. We can note that at the same time as the Glasgow strike, tenants were involved in actions in Birkenhead, although they received rather less attention. Moorhouse *et al* (1972) reported that two thousand women were involved in a march to the Town Hall in Birkenhead behind the slogan 'Father is fighting in Flanders, We are fighting the landlords here' (Moorhouse *et al*, 1972: 135). As in Glasgow, rising rents in the context of inflation led to unrest, reflected in demonstrations in Merseyside and elsewhere (Moorhouse *et al*, 1972). But it was the special conditions of the *locality* and the war, the Clyde was especially important for the manufacture of munitions, which made the strike there effective in forcing the government's intervention.

It was noted above that the 1960s saw local authorities in Britain planning to increase rent levels in order to balance their housing revenue accounts and to ease debt incurred through building programmes. It was further noted that tenants took action in response to these policies in a number of areas. Sklair (1975) noted a rent strike in Liverpool lasting six months as an indicator of tenant opposition to the increases. Indeed, the small concession won by the tenants (a reduction of 2/6d) was influential in relation to subsequent struggles. Tenants recognised what was possible by their action and lessons of a political nature were learned. The significance of this small success is reflected in Lowe's study of the Sheffield tenants' movement which documents how the tenants' movement there was unsuccessful in preventing the introduction of rent increases and a rebate scheme: 'It is clear that in Sheffield the struggle of 1968 to 1969 blunted the edge of the resistance to the Housing Finance Act' (Lowe, 1986: 106).

Early tenants' struggles in a city inform tenants about strategies and other lessons which can be applied in future actions taking place there and, sometimes, beyond that city-region. Sklair (1975) observed that one of the best organised, longest lasting and largest rent strikes in England took place in Kirkby in response to the Housing Finance Act. It was noted earlier that rent strikes were more apt to occur in areas where the council moved swiftly

to implement 'fair rents'. Tenants of Liverpool Corporation did initially withhold the rent increases but their action soon faded away. Tenants of Kirkby council, however, withheld not only the increases but the whole rent and rates due on the Tower Hill estate and this action continued for over a year. Seven Tower Hill tenants were imprisoned before a settlement was negotiated. Ultimately the struggle was unsuccessful since the tenants of Tower Hill, under the guidance of Tower Hill Unfair Rents Action Group (THURAG), could not prevent the increases being implemented.

Sklair drew attention to a number of key issues to be noted in relation to this action. Firstly, the role of political activists in the leadership of THURAG is significant. These activists came from the International Socialists (IS: now known as the Socialist Workers' Party) and the Communist Party. But these activists were not organisers of the strike (Sklair, 1975). There was some conflict between these parties and neither had a majority on THURAG's leadership. Indeed, some of the activists faced disciplinary action from their respective parties because of their 'semi-autonomous' activities on Tower Hill (Sklair, 1975: 272). Sklair, however, drew attention to their contribution to the organisation, especially their leadership skills and experience derived from organising in the industrial sphere.

The Tower Hill action illustrates something of the link between struggles in the industrial and consumption sectors, the contribution of the former to the latter and the fragility and tensions contained in the relationship. Sklair's account described how tenants succeeded in their campaign to reinstate workers at the Bird's Eye factory after some were sacked for their involvement in demonstrations over the rent increases. Sklair showed the problems and benefits of linking industrial and consumption sector struggles. The high degree of organisation and the willingness of tenants to take direct action was demonstrated to the authorities in Merseyside. On the other hand tenants expected union support and came to depend upon the industrial action that had been promised, which was not forthcoming. There are a number of possible reasons why labour movement support was not given to the Tower Hill tenants. Perhaps the build up to the miners strike of 1973 influenced the willingness of the labour movement to become involved in this particular struggle. It was also likely that resentment had built up against people who had not paid rent and rates for a year, and with it a reluctance to rescue what some perceived as an International Socialist initiative (Sklair, 1975). The damaging nature of explicit political differences within the tenant's movement was recognised by tenant activists in Merseyside in this period (Mrs M. Gallimore, in Sklair, 1975). This was to have important implications for the way

tenant struggles were subsequently conducted in Merseyside.

Tactics, strategies and mobilisation

Lowe's (1986) study of the tenants' movement in Sheffield shows how losing the struggle against the Housing Finance Act threw the movement into decline. There was another surge of activity in the late 1970s but the 'rents issue had been decisively lost and was largely stripped from the agenda' (Lowe, 1986: 93).

Lowe's discussion of the tenants' movement of the late 1970s illustrates something of the issues around which tenants mobilised, after losing the rent struggle, and the changed strategies employed. 'Street theatre, behind the scenes lobbying, low key demonstrations and publicity events' (1986: 93) became common tactics, but are a far cry from the rent strikes of the earlier period. Tenants organised in response to a proposed tenants' charter, dampness, repairs and heating for example. But with the exception of some isolated struggles over rent increases the early 1980s, militant action on behalf of tenants was not widespread (see Lowe, 1986). The renewed, low key, tenants' movement of the late 1970s and 1980s was also characterised by the employment of professional community workers and community and neighbourhood organisers (Lowe, 1986). I will elaborate on this aspect of tenant organisation later. For the moment it may be noted that

the tenants' movement occupied a defensive position which often was unable to make progress on even these limited demands. Cuts to public expenditure (especially to housing) and centralisation of policy making to Whitehall (Lowe, 1986) limited the tenants' capacity to make gains. The tenants' movement has traditionally found it very hard to organise against centrally determined policies (Lowe, 1986).

In his discussion of *urban social movements* in Britain in the 1980s Lowe (1986) suggested that although the tenants' movement may be experiencing a lull, the absence of widespread manifest activity is probably due more to a changed negotiating stance. Insider connections with local authorities, joint actions with the Labour Party and public sector trade unions, would be common tactics in this new phase, according to Lowe. Especially where shared interests are evident between providers and consumers in the socialised sector, in a context of diminished public provision and the centralisation of power.

Lowe's discussion suggested that the focus of urban social movements is on the 'use-values' of urban resources, especially housing. Later in the chapter, however, I develop an analysis of tenants' mass actions in Merseyside which emerged in response to central government policies and threats to the material base of their tenure as well as to the use-value of their tenancies. The analysis differs

in a number of important ways from that of Lowe. I argue that the tenants' movement ought to be theorised in the context of large scale removal of housing from the local authority and the expansion of the role of central government agencies and un-elected bodies in policy-making. The role of urban ideologies referred to by Lowe in his discussion of mobilisation needs, therefore, to be expanded in the light of this.

Lowe's work, whilst requiring extension in the light of historical and political developments (notably the change in the balance of tenure), remains useful for understanding the process of housing action group mobilisation. His analysis shows the contribution of writers like Rex and Moore (1967) and Peter Saunders, although there is a tendency to accept the work of these writers rather uncritically.

Stuart Lowe was concerned to investigate the mobilisation of tenants through urban social movement theory. He tries to deconstruct the process of mobilisation and make manifest the factors which inhibit action. Unfortunately, Lowe tries to encompass the concept of non-protest within a definition of mobilisation, to the extent that his ideas become contradictory: 'Mobilisation is taken to mean, therefore, both organisational action and also non-protest on apparently objective issue bases' (Lowe, 1986: 55). I follow Lowe in agreeing with Dunleavy

(1977) that action and non-action need to be held within the same analytical framework (cited in Lowe, 1986). But this does not necessarily mean that it should be held within the same conceptual terms. Mobilisation, at its most basic level, must mean the process of becoming ready for action, de-mobilisation refers to a disengagement from action, while non-mobilisation is used in reference to a failure to achieve assembly and readiness for action. All need to be explained but they involve *different processes and explanations*.

The main factors Lowe argued to be significant in conditioning tenants' mobilisation are, in the British context: *the political structure and process of local political systems, the identification of social bases and their potential to generate urban movements, and the influence of key urban ideologies* (Lowe, 1986: 55 [emphasis added]). Lowe's ideas are useful but, as we shall see, fail to go far enough.

Undoubtedly the local political system is important in influencing the nature, action and impact of groups at the local level. The earlier discussion of tenants' action (rent strikes) showed the importance of formal party political opposition to the Housing Finance Act, at the local level, for influencing action and non-action taken by tenants against the Act. Lowe argued that three main features of the local political system influence tenant

mobilisation. Firstly, local authorities are often regarded as being isolated from effective influence by the public. In this sense action groups emerge to effect policy changes in the context of an unresponsive, bureaucratic and oligarchic local polity. Secondly, and perhaps to a lesser extent than Lowe suggested, the local authority, by simply dominating local politics, and through its autonomy from central government, has a strong influence on the nature and characteristics of organisations, their strategies and tactics. The third factor which has an impact upon the tactics and strategy of local action groups refers to the kind of links between local issue groups and the party political system, and whether these are through key members or officers. In sum, Lowe's analysis pointed towards the local authority's influence on the activities of local action groups as being fundamental because of its dominant position in determining and executing policy at the local level. The problem with this analysis is that the local authority is not 'inevitably regarded as the major store of political power' (Lowe, 1986: 60). Given this lack of inevitability it is not the case that 'tactics and strategy of non-party movements are consequently invariably directed towards establishing some form of negotiating position with the relevant service departments' (1986: 60). Lowe's emphasis on the 'historical and institutional realities' which influence the tactical responses community and housing groups make to urban policy is surely correct. But the

problem of confronting an analysis of community groups' responses to urban policies, especially those made outside the local authority, in Whitehall, or in a central government department organised at the local level, through government QUANGO or a housing association, for example, remains. This is a critical point in the 1990's context and one which will be expanded later.

Lowe's analysis sought to identify social bases from which collective action may or may not develop, he found that these are most frequently found to be (a) residential communities or (b) a variety of sectoral consumption cleavages which are defined by shared access to a publicly or privately consumed service. Although he suggested that distinctions between (a) and (b) may be difficult, such as in the case of council tenants sharing an estate or distinct geographical area. Collective action may not develop from these social bases but he suggested that 'these bases... have the greatest objective potential for a collective response because there are distinct material interests at stake, and are frequently the targets of the policy process' (Lowe, 1986: 62). The problems of viewing consumption divisions as political categories in this way have already been dealt with earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Two.

Lowe drew attention to the 'community studies' literature of the 1950s and 1960s and the information

contained there about the associational structures of localities. Their contribution is to the understanding of social bases from which collective action may arise, and is found, in particular, in the way that different experiences of community result in different ways of organising. Lowe (1986) suggested that working class communities often have an instrumental attitude towards public organisation: compelling reasons are required before people assemble themselves to take action, even then people often look towards established networks in the first instance. The community studies also show how factors like status (the ideas of 'respectable' working class and 'respectable' areas and 'rough ends' of estates) influence networks and associations. From this Lowe argued that a knowledge of the social structures and social histories of localities is important in order to understand the process and mechanisms involved in mobilising a community. The community studies provide guidance but many working class communities have seen a great deal of change regarding demographic factors, the family, the role of women, affluence, impoverishment, access to transport and technology in the contemporary period, all of which will have an impact on the likelihood of mobilisation and need to be accounted for in an analysis.

The problems of viewing consumption sectors as bases from which collective action is likely to emerge have already been highlighted. However, the problem is not that

consumption interests have little relevance, but concerns the way that consumption interests have been conceptualised and that they have been linked in a causal fashion with a particular type of provision. Consumption interests are mediated through a number of mechanisms (Lowe, 1986). The work of Rex and Moore (1967) is of great significance here since it illustrated the range of processes (social and economic) which mediated the housing market and led to the creation of distinct consumption interests, as Lowe recognised. Moreover, their work also shows some of the contingencies which may prevent the recognition of consumption sector interests (in Lowe's terms) or housing class consciousness and community action. These may include status or allegiances such as ethnicity. The importance of Rex and Moore's work on the associations of an area and their role in promoting or inhibiting mobilisation is recognised here as significant, these may facilitate the articulation of issues to the public and the process of assembly necessary for mobilisation and action.

Lowe argued that of particular importance in the mobilisation process is the role of a variety of 'urban ideologies' which condition the terms under which movements develop. The idea of local government as representative democracy, responsive to its citizens, irrespective of evidence or experience to the contrary may have such an impact. This has the effect of pushing non-party groups into structures which match this ideal: representative,

democratic, with broadly based memberships that can be shown to be reflective of the communities they can effectively claim to represent, or developing insider contacts which may mean compromising on their demands (Lowe, 1986). 'Rate-payer ideology' as described by Dunleavy (1980) is important in influencing mobilisation in the locality according to Lowe. Because of its influence, those who determine policy, either implicitly or explicitly, question proposed policies with reference to 'what the rate-payers might think?'. Bound up with this ideology is the associated belief that ratepayers are owner-occupiers and are not subsidised, while council tenants are and pay no rates. Although tenants pay local taxes like owner-occupiers, and owner-occupiers are highly subsidised through the public purse (MITR), this ideology remains pervasive according to Lowe (1986). Related to these ideologies are others surrounding public and privately supplied urban services and beliefs about the desirability of one mode of provision over another. Lowe (1986) suggested that protest movements have occurred on both sides of this divide, for example groups campaigning to prevent privatisation of urban services, and those against increases in public spending (rate-payers associations, for example).

Lowe's discussion of ideological influences on the mobilisation of what he calls urban social movements is useful. It is important to note however that there are

considerable problems associated with researching 'urban ideologies' which, following Lowe, can determine the nature and form, and even the existence, of residents' and housing action groups, these are not discussed in Lowe's work. Secondly, and notwithstanding the above, Lowe fails to account for locality specific ideologies: those arising from local political, economic and social processes which may differ to those operating at national (and global) level, and those which are promoted by interests outside the public-private dichotomy, which remains unproblematic for Lowe. In particular I am referring to ideologies surrounding the voluntary sector of housing, a sector which is not inconsiderable in the Merseyside context. I will expand some tentative ideas about the 'new urban ideologies' which should be included in such an analysis.

Centralisation of policy-making: considerations for mobilisation

I argued earlier that one of the main problems with Lowe's analysis was that he over-emphasised the importance of the local authority in urban policy making. The importance of locating other policy making and service delivering agencies in the analysis is demonstrated in this section. One of the main concerns here is to illustrate the shift in the locale of decision making away from locally elected councils, and towards Westminster or unelected bodies at city or regional level.

The discussion of the historical struggles over rent have already shown a steady centralisation of power over the post-war period. Indeed, as Dunleavy has shown, unelected bodies, or QUANGOs, have become institutionalised in the city-region over this time. Centralisation has been pursued by both Labour and Conservative governments alike. We may note the establishment of the regional water authorities (set up after local government reorganisation in 1974-5), the Housing Corporation, or indeed the 85 such organisations established in the period 1946-75 discussed by Dunleavy, together with the fact that few powers have been transferred back to local authorities as evidence of this (Dunleavy, 1980 cited in Blowers and Raine, 1984). However, centralisation pursued before 1979 differs greatly to that which followed. The desire for economies of scale, uniform standards, and the economic recession (which followed the oil crisis) of the 1970s inform discussions of increasing central control over local government and local spending in the years prior to 1979. That cuts in local expenditure were administered across the board, focusing on total levels of government grant and monies borrowed by local authorities (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988) further illustrates the point. While local government expenditure was restrained, local councils remained able to exercise some autonomy by exercising their political will and increasing their local rates (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). The situation which followed the election of the Conservative government in 1979 represented a fundamental

shift as central government consolidated its power to determine both the amount and direction of local spending.

Centralisation through the control of local spending and the removal of local authority functions to unelected boards since 1979 has followed an altogether political and ideological rationale. General restraints on expenditure have given way to direct controls over particular (especially Labour controlled) local authorities and specific policies (especially housing, education and transport) (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). But the shift has not been straightforward. Successive pieces of legislation designed to provide the mechanisms for controlling local spending have faced difficulties (for example, the 1980 Local Government Act and the 1982 Local Government and Finance Act) and required further manipulation in order to 'catch' the Labour controlled 'high spenders' and avoid Conservative controlled councils (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). Rate capping in 1984 constituted a further attack on local councils' ability to set local rates and defend local services against centrally imposed cuts (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Blowers and Raine, 1984). Despite the government's argument that rate-capping would strengthen democracy at the local level, local people were now denied the opportunity to vote for higher spending on local services. The Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Poll Tax) continued this trend.

The arguments that accountability would be promoted at the local level, and that central government was promoting efficiency and more simplified structures, were used to justify the abolition of the six Metropolitan County Councils (MCCs) and the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1986 (themselves set up by a Conservative Government), although there is little independent evidence to support these arguments (Clarke, 1986). Indeed, most commentators have argued that the unelected boards and the myriad of arrangements which have been put in place to carry out the functions of the MCCs and the GLC have resulted in a more complicated structure of functions, a diminution of accountability and have further centralised power to Westminster (Clarke, 1986).

Redistribution of power, decentralisation of decision-making, and the promotion of efficiency have been the arguments put forward by central government during the drafting of legislation to privatise local government services (Parkinson, 1988). Critics deny that a decentralisation of power has taken place, instead, consumer power is seen to be symbolic to the legislation rather than having any real effect (Parkinson, 1988). One effect has been the establishment of a number of QUANGOs, the promotion of existing un-elected bodies, and the private sector increasingly taking on functions previously the responsibility of the local authority. Urban Development Corporations, housing associations (through the

Housing Corporation), Task Forces, CATs, HATs and more recently City Challenge are increasingly taking on the role of providing housing and economic regeneration (Stoker, 1989). Boards of civil servants, private sector nominees and some local government officials are increasingly charged with the responsibility of defining local urban policy. In education and social services, private, 'opted out', voluntary, and in the case of social services in particular, informal provision through the family, are being promoted to supplant and compete with local government provision.

In the case of housing policy these processes have been reflected throughout the 1980s and early 1990s as part and parcel of the philosophies of the new right (Spencer, 1989). Successive pieces of legislation from the 1980 Housing Act to the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act have striven to limit the autonomy of local authorities' housing policy and enforce national government priorities. Central government clearly regards local authorities as 'enablers of services rather than sole provider' (Spencer, 1989; Bramley, 1993). Cuts in Housing Investment Programme allocations and strict financial controls have constrained the activities of local authorities in the housing field, while stocks already in their control have been removed through the 'right to buy', under the terms of the 1980 Housing Act. Local authority stock was also to be removed by Tenants' Choice and Housing Action Trusts (under the

provisions of the 1988 Housing Act) and where stock remains under local authority control, the use of City Action Grants and Estate Action funding serves to bring local authorities under central scrutiny (Spencer, 1989). Housing associations and the private sector are encouraged to become the providers of housing. And, indeed, they have. The changing nature of housing provision is seen clearly in the fact that for the first time in 1989-90 housing association construction of new homes exceeded those built by local authorities. The ten years from 1979 saw total expenditure on council housing decline by 80% in real terms and an increasing proportion of total housing expenditure was channelled through the Housing Corporation to housing associations (Spencer, 1989) and into Mortgage Interest Tax Relief (MITR). Housing associations were to take over the local authorities' role of providing social housing or compete with their provision (through Tenants' Choice for example).

The changing balance of tenure in Liverpool

On the national level these trends have, of course, resulted in continuing changes in the balance of tenure. In 1979 owner-occupation represented 55% of stock, council housing accounted for 32%, the private rented sector amounted to 11%, and housing associations held approximately 2% of national housing stock. Ten years later, owner-occupation accounted for 67%, councils held

23% and private landlords and housing associations had 7% and 3% respectively. In Liverpool the balance of tenure is different reflecting at least in part the different social, political and economic processes at city level. The figures at the onset of the fieldwork period (1991) were: 59.01% private; 30.36% local authority; 10.53% housing association and 0.08% 'other' stock²⁴.

Housing has been long and high on the agenda of local politics in Liverpool. Different forms of provision have taken precedence over others at different times and have been promoted by a variety of different interests. Support for particular housing policies cannot, however, be seen simply as a matter for particular political philosophies, as we will see later. In Merseyside other factors have influenced political allegiances, housing policy and neighbourhood activism. Smith (1984), for example, notes the strong influence, historically, of sectarianism in Liverpool which resulted in affiliations along the lines of Protestantism, Toryism; Irish Nationalism and Catholicism. Indeed, she suggests that these affiliations were far stronger than any embryonic working class organisations, partly because of the weak nature of trade unions and other working people's organisations. In the main this situation derived from the way that labour was organised in the city. These processes were influenced by work practices in the docks (casual labour) and the significance of the sectarian

²⁴ Liverpool City Council Housing Department Figures, 1991.

divide in dockside industries during the inter-war period. Smith notes also that the city was divided into very sharply defined neighbourhoods along these sectarian lines and that activism often took the form of 'riot' rather than association or pressure group.

In Liverpool from 1909 to 1922, the pattern of politics was one of alternating riot: anti-Catholic riot, strike riot, anti-German riot, post-war riots, anti-black riot, unemployed riot. Evolutionary socialism was not a 'natural' belief in Liverpool (Smith, 1984: 43).

Nevertheless, even in this period, social reform, especially in the housing sphere was an important feature of politics in Liverpool. Indeed, in the 1911 Municipal Elections both the Tories and the Irish Nationalist leaders stood on their record in the housing sphere, the latter having done deals with the former to bring about reform (Smith, 1984).

The existence of the large voluntary sector in Liverpool is also a feature related to the workings of the local political system. Housing associations have a long history in the city, for example Merseyside Improved Houses (formerly Liverpool Improved Houses) was established by notable social reformers such as the Rathbones and Dorothy Keeling of the Liverpool Personal Service Society in 1928. The housing association movement grew rapidly from the 1960s and 1970s and especially after the 1974 Housing Act which provided grants from the Housing Corporation. However, before 1974 housing associations were promoted by

the council under the Liberals. By the late 1980s they had become the major players in areas where private landlords were seeking an exit. They are the major landlords in some wards and are expanding their stock. Their role is promoted by central government as the main provider of social housing in competition with, and instead of, that provided by the local authority. The size of the housing association sector is one of Liverpool's distinctive features.

On the national level, central government promotion of changes in ownership of domestic property has resulted in conflict. The introduction of the 'right-to buy' in 1980 resulted in some opposition on council estates and some joint campaigns were initiated between tenants' groups and the Labour Party, however the popularity of the policy meant that this opposition was not long lasting (Lowe, 1986). In Liverpool the principle of local authority housing provision was a core issue in the city's fight with central government. Under the control of Labour (the 'hard left') from 1983, the city council continued building houses when it had all but ceased elsewhere because of funding restrictions, by using a legal accounting loophole. The policy received some criticism notably because of the failure of the council to accept that it was operating a racially discriminatory policy (Liverpool Black Caucus, 1986) and that black Liverpoolians were not benefitting from this action as a result. But the importance of the

principle of local authority housing to the local council was clearly evident as was its widespread appeal.

The election of the 'hard left' Labour council in 1983 meant that supporting council owned stock was the main plank of housing policy in Liverpool. But at this time another form of housing provision was expanding in the city. Co-operatives on Merseyside were developing on a piecemeal basis, outside any particular political philosophy. The Liberals had promoted co-ops as part of their improvement package for South Liverpool and funded co-ops through their Housing Investment Programme in the early 1980s.

The reasons inspiring the development of the co-operative housing sector are diverse but can be accounted for, at least in part, by the growing crisis in council housing²⁵; a desire to control one's housing but an inability to afford owner-occupation; and the existence and growth of the voluntary housing movement which often

²⁵ During the fieldwork I noticed a high level of interest in co-operatives in Merseyside. In the main this came from council tenants. Some of the proposed HAT tenants in Liverpool expressed an interest in finding out more about running a co-op and taking over their property at the end of the HAT. In addition, the Knowsley office of Merseyside Improved Houses received enquiries from about 2 groups a week who were interested in setting up a Tenant Management Co-operative (TMC). Workers at this office noted that few, if any, requests about TMCs came from tenants of MIH (Tenant Participation and Co-op Workers Meeting at Wavertree Road, 5.3.92).

promotes co-operative housing as part of their operations²⁶. Co-ops in Liverpool date back to the late 1960s and early 1970s and, in particular, to the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project and the formation of the Granby and Canning Housing Co-ops. Indeed, Merseyside is thought to have one of the biggest co-operative sectors in the country with only London's sector being larger. Co-operative enthusiasts in Merseyside point out that in London the sector is bigger because the GLC declared an amnesty on squatting. Squatting groups went on to form co-ops. The co-operative movement in Liverpool faced hostility from the incoming Militant controlled Labour council in 1983, however. Co-ops were seen as 'a Tory plot to undermine council housing'²⁷. In spite of the Militant controlled Labour council, rather than because of it, the movement grew through the 1980s.

In the contemporary period, as in the past, the way that local councils have dealt with housing policy has undoubtedly influenced the way that communities have responded to their experience of housing in general, and their mobilisation in particular. As we have seen, central government has increasingly constrained housing policy options at the local level. Community groups in modern

²⁶ MIH had been involved in working with co-ops, mainly TMCs since 1980, although it did not have a coherent policy in relation to this at the time of the fieldwork.

²⁷ *The History of Co-operatives on Merseyside* p4.

Merseyside when responding to local urban policies do not, however, simply respond in terms filtered through urban ideologies like those described by Lowe. Rather, the council and other bodies operating at the local level are seen in a variety of, often contradictory, ways at different times, by the same, and different groups. Furthermore, the 'QUANGOCRACY'²⁸ often promote new ideologies, which can also be contradictory, at the local level and feed into the complex range of ideologies which are available to, and have an impact upon, local housing and community groups.

As I have already indicated, the rent struggle was effectively lost when the 1972 Housing Finance Act came into operation. In Liverpool there has been a history of opposition to rent increases in the council chamber leading to traditionally low rents in the city, and, as indicated above, the evidence suggests that where local authorities have taken oppositional action, local groups have tended not to mobilise. As Lowe has shown, tenants' groups have taken the line of least resistance. However, in the contemporary period tenants have mobilised on a massive scale over threats to their rights of occupancy, a material base of tenurial relations. Recent struggles over the rights of council tenants in Liverpool's high rise blocks

²⁸ Cohen, N., Judd, J., Jones, J., and Clement, B. 'What Happened to Democracy?' *The Independent* on Sunday 28.3.93. p19.

has been remarkable if not only because they have managed to alter an ideologically-driven piece of central government legislation very significantly. In Runcorn, my second example, tenants took action, similar in a number of ways to the HAT tenants, when they were faced with the take-over of the Runcorn Development Corporation property.

The High Rise Group: struggles over occupancy and ownership in Liverpool

During the three weeks from 20th July to 5th August 1992 tenants in 67 (out of 71) blocks of high rise flats in Liverpool voted for their blocks to become part of the Liverpool Voluntary Housing Action Trust. The (moderate Labour) council could no longer afford to up-grade and maintain the properties at modern standards. The 'pragmatic' Director of Housing Mike Maunder having examined the resources available believed that the only feasible way of carrying out the work needed was under the auspices of a HAT. The council carried out a feasibility study, made costings and carried out a consultation process with tenants. A proposal was subsequently put to the Department of the Environment. Mike Maunder argued that 'a HAT "is purely a mechanism for bringing money into the city. I don't think anyone supports the actual concept of HATs"' and that 'the council was attracted to the idea of a HAT after seeing the concessions won by Hull and Waltham Forest, the only authorities to have successfully set up HATs so far' (Black, 1993: 20).

An examination of the issues over which the High Rise tenants organised will show clearly that their struggle was over (a) the material base of tenurial relations, and (b) directed at the funders and providers of housing namely central government and the local authority. Tenants wanted to be consulted *fully* on all the proposals affecting their tenancies, they felt that the city council's consultation was inadequate, and they wanted to have *their say* over which, if any, high rise blocks were to be included in the Liverpool HAT. For the tenants there were some considerable disadvantages associated with the HAT. The great anxiety for tenants was over what would happen to the properties and their tenancies after the HAT. This concern was articulated by many housing and tenants' organisations during the progression of the legislation through Parliament. The tenants' demands can be summarised as: *retention of secure tenancies after the HAT; retainment of the right to buy, to repair, to be consulted or to transfer to another landlord, and very significantly, the right to return to the ownership and control of the council, and for the council to be provided with adequate resources to undertake this commitment after the HAT.*

As Lowe (1986) argued, the social base is crucial to the likelihood and form of organising. We may note that the tenants considering the HAT were a fairly homogeneous group of tenants, virtually all working class, white, and, of the main activists, many were near or past retirement

age. Of the meetings I attended, a quick visual survey of those in attendance told me that approximately half, or more, were women. In some blocks in particular, such as in Sheil Park, many tenants attending meetings had lived in the blocks since construction, having been re-housed during slum clearance programmes. In this context a considerable number of respondents indicated that they thought the blocks were wonderful when they first moved in.

The high rise blocks were inhabited almost exclusively by white men and women, though not all were native born Liverpudlians. Many people in Liverpool are of Irish decent and there were some Irish born people and a number of internal migrants from Scotland and Wales, for example, who had moved to the city when the local economy was considerably more buoyant than it is at present, who had settled in the blocks. There are very few black people in the high rise blocks. No black people were observed at any of the meetings I attended. The high rise blocks are located outside the established areas of black residence (Granby in particular and to a lesser extent in Canning and Smithdown), the processes commonly associated with residential racial segregation (referred to in Chapter Two in relation to Rex and Moore's work; see also Smith, 1989) account for this situation.

As Lowe said there are status differences in working class communities which have an effect upon tenants'

organisation. Lowe suggested that this may be reflected in commonly held ideas about respectable and rough estates, or parts of estates. In the case of the high rise blocks it was often considered that certain blocks were seen to be far more desirable than others, and this was reflected in differences in waiting list measured demand. Moreover, the desirability of the respective blocks was seen as both cause and effect of the kind of tenants who were allocated flats in various blocks. It was often suggested that some blocks were used as 'dumping grounds' for 'kids, smackheads, wife beaters, and drunks' (See Black, 1993: 20-21). A number of High Rise Group and block's tenants' group activists indicated that they were motivated to become involved in housing management to prevent tenancies being allocated to 'unsuitable, undesirable or anti-social tenants'. Finally, in relation to the social composition of the HRG, we can observe that all those involved shared a common position in that they occupy similar properties in the socialised consumption sector, as local authority tenants.

It is useful to expand a discussion of some of the organisational relationships that the High Rise Group developed as it will demonstrate the way that some of the processes discussed earlier in the chapter were reflected in the modern period in Merseyside. Indeed, it will show that some of the processes which have been argued to facilitate successful working class tenant action in the

past have not been applicable in this case. The ability to and the importance of locating the struggle in the context of an occupational community for example is not relevant in the modern Merseyside context. As such the enhanced bargaining power gained through the use or threat of industrial action in the workplace is not applicable here. Occupational communities have declined in the Merseyside region, because industries have disappeared (deindustrialization or decentralisation) or because those communities have been removed (through slum clearance and re-housing for example). In addition, many tenants were outside paid employment; in retirement or economically inactive because of sickness, disability, unemployment or in unpaid work (housewives and voluntary workers, for example). Other features worthy of note, which are quite striking in the modern period, include the de-politicisation of 'organisers' in the modern Merseyside context.

It was noted earlier in the chapter that people described as 'politicals' have helped tenants to organise over their consumption sector interests, and have helped to link struggles to the industrial sphere or wider working class movements. Such 'politicals' often provided continuity between actions taken at different times but in the same geographical area (Sklair, 1975). We have seen above that these activists sometimes had a background in the Communist Party and the International Socialists (now

the Socialist Workers' Party) although they may not necessarily be representing their respective parties in any official capacity during the tenants' action. In the case of the High Rise Tenants the role of the political activist is not visible. While some respondents were members (or former members) of the parties noted above, few would advertise this fact. Indeed, I found it essential at the onset of the fieldwork to emphasise that my interest in the HRG was not as a political activist, but rather as a research student. There was considerable suspicion of what is known as the 'Broad Left' on the HRG, and the group went to great lengths to avoid infiltration. I would suggest that this was partly a result of the ideological support for particular forms of housing (namely municipal council housing) held on behalf of the Broad Left which may result in an ideological opposition to the HAT because, as the legislation intended, it means the removal of council control of the properties, despite the fact that the HAT may be the only realistic policy to improve the blocks. Secondly, it may be suggested that the danger of overt political conflict on the HRG, and the prospect of 'damaging political differences' like those following the 1969 Rent Strike in Liverpool (noted in Sklair, 1975), may have been in the minds of tenants in Liverpool. Indeed this was reported in 1969 by Mrs Marjorie Gallimore (in Sklair, 1975), who was at the time of the present research, the Chair of the HRG (later a tenant representative of the HAT board). On a more general level, it is difficult for

tenants' groups to label themselves political because of the way the charity laws operate. Many groups strive for charity status because of the funding advantages and the independence it offers.

Very few tenants' organisations would operate without some support and assistance with their organisation and mobilisation, however. The community workers of the late 1960s and early 1970s (under the Community Development Project or through council social service departments) provided such a role. In the modern context this role has been filled by tenant participation workers. I will discuss the role of workers in tenant participation in Chapter Six. In the case of the High Rise Group, agents (known as 'tenants' friends') were employed using Section 16 funding. The tenants' friends who worked for the High Rise Tenants were from the following agencies: Liverpool Housing Trust, Community Development Services, Priority Estates Project and Merseyside Improved Houses. Each agency had responsibility for 17 or so blocks. Formally, LHT had responsibility for taking a lead role but in reality the situation was one of inter-agency co-operation. Both LHT and MIH seconded workers to the HATs project. From my observations it seemed that they succeeded in creating a rapport with the tenants' groups they worked with. Their roles were those of professional housing workers rather than political organisers, a role which was expected of them from their employers, the tenants, as well

as from those agencies they would be expected to liaise with such as the City Council, other tenants' groups, and government representatives for example. Of course, the tenants recognised the political nature of the issues associated with the Liverpool Housing Action Trust. The point is that overt political concerns had to be suppressed to a pragmatism which inevitably meant some compromises on each side whether tenant, council or Government.

The HRG's strategy was not one of joint actions pursued with the Labour Party or the unions as Lowe's (1986) observations would suggest. There were some joint interests but these were not brought to fruition in a joint manner. The caretakers of the high rise blocks, for example, represented through NUPE were concerned that their terms and conditions of employment may be eroded under the HAT. The tenants were worried about the quality of their tenancies and security of tenure in a similar way. Moreover, as caretakers these workers are also residents and therefore they share concerns with the rest of the tenancy. At a meeting in December 1991 a representative of the Caretakers' Union, NUPE, informed a meeting of the HRG Steering Committee about their concerns. The representative indicated that caretakers have interests as tenants regarding repairs, security and living conditions. He noted that they also make representations on behalf of tenants to the housing department and assist tenants when they are worried about repairs. Like tenants, caretakers

often feel that they are not taken seriously by the housing department. But despite the evident joint concerns between the trades union and the HRG no formal joint structures were developed. The NUPE representative at this meeting said that, as a union, they did not have an opinion at that time on whether there should be a HAT established or not, and that the union would wait until the Tenants' Expectation Document (TED, later the Joint Statement) had been published before such an opinion would be given. The union representative indicated that the caretakers agreed that the tenants, not the council, or anyone else, should decide whether a HAT is formally declared or not. Some members of the Steering Committee (who seemed in favour of the HAT) did want to give assurances to the caretakers and have these guarantees written into the TED. But no guarantees could be made since the tenants lacked the power to make such a declaration. Where co-operation did occur it was in the form of supplying information to their respective constituencies. Members of the HRG agreed to speak at NUPE meetings and representatives of the union would speak at meetings of the Group.

Tenants in the proposed Housing Action Trust were organised in the following way: Tenants' groups and tenants' committees were organised in each of the 70 or so blocks. From these, one representative from each of the blocks had a place on the City Wide High Rise Tenants' Committee. This group met regularly to discuss the views

of the tenants on the blocks and to put forward instructions to the Steering Group. The Steering Group was made up of 20 tenants nominated from the City Wide High Rise Tenants' Committee. The Steering Group had the main responsibility for negotiating 'the deal' before the ballot took place. The Steering Group therefore had responsibility for negotiating with the Minister for Housing (Sir George Young), the HAT board of Management, Liverpool City Council, and any other body as deemed relevant by the HRG, such as the Shadow Housing Minister. This was important as negotiations were going on regarding the deal for tenants under the HAT in the run up to the General Election. The tenants wanted to know what the position of the Labour Party would be in the event of taking office after the General Election. Suffice it here to note the way that the High Rise Tenants were organised to conduct the necessary negotiations.

The consultants/agents employed by the tenants, in addition to providing impartial advice, had a responsibility for developing representative structures and organising the tenants. The consultants were interviewed by just seven tenants at the onset. The agents selected worked closely with tenants at block level, held public meetings, organised workshops and conferences and distributed newsletters and leaflets. Within three months tenants' groups and committees had been established on nearly all the blocks (68/69: one of the blocks was empty)

and representatives and their deputies had been trained so that the HRG and the Steering Committee could work as a democratic and representative structure.

The major issue uniting the tenants was concern over the future of their housing: if the blocks were to become the Liverpool HAT or, indeed, if they did not vote in that direction. I have discussed the importance of past struggles for present ones in an earlier part of this chapter. Here we may note that one of the features shaping the form and degree of mobilisation was the existence already of tenants' associations or a history of organising on the blocks, whether formally constituted or not. The response to the HAT proposal did vary from block to block: Those with a history of organising were by far the most active. But the significance of an established tenants' association is not always straightforward. In Sheil Park, for example, there was a high level of activity. Here a tenants' association had been active in the past but had broken up acrimoniously. Personal antagonisms were evident and people often attended meetings in large numbers to hear what others were saying. The issues being discussed, however, were sufficiently serious to keep minds focused on the reasons the meetings were taking place and to avoid personal arguments. Nevertheless, I had assumed that the connection between such a high level of activity on Sheil Park and the history of organisation was the creation of a knowledge of how to mobilise the community quickly, thus

may involve compromising their demands (Lowe, 1986). Otherwise organisations and institutions who can make this claim, however, tenuously (eg political parties), will attempt to delegitimise urban protest made in response to the whole or part of the controlling party's programme (Lowe, 1986: 78). We can find support for these arguments in the case of the HRG. Lowe (1986), Moorhouse *et al* (1972) and Sklair (1975) each noted the impact of local authority opposition to central government policies on the likelihood of tenants organising in response to national legislation. Lowe added that the accessibility and responsiveness of local authority departments (members and officers) had a significant bearing on the nature and tactics of tenants' actions. In an earlier part of this chapter it was further noted that mobilisation may be inhibited by a strong ideology of local councils as representative democracy and open to influence. The main thrust of this argument is accepted but it does contain a tendency to simplify ideological processes. It is necessary to sketch some of these processes in relation to the HAT campaign, although the methodological problems associated with researching urban ideologies need to be borne in mind.

The most satisfactory way of examining these issues was to note the variety of perceptions of the local authority articulated by the tenants in the proposed

Liverpool HAT²⁹. It soon became clear that the council is viewed in very contradictory ways in Liverpool. On one hand the council in Liverpool is viewed in terms discussed by Lowe: democratic, responsive to local rather than national priorities; its services provided on the basis of need and not according to market demand; secure council tenancies are allocated at the lowest possible rent, without profit to the council. '[It's] still the corpy - its what the corpy stands for' (Interview 20.11.91). There was a strong view that the council is accountable to the community. Such views are seen in the case of Bill McWilliams, a tenant activist for many years, who said, in reference to the future of his flat after the HAT, that he will not be too happy if it is taken over by a housing association instead of returning to the council. 'The way things are now, I can go down to the community centre and bollock the councillor if something's going wrong. But I'll be met at the door of a housing association, someone will ask my name and address, tell me to hand in my complaint, and that'll be that' (in Black, 1993: 20). Equally, many organised tenants perceived the local authority to be bureaucratic, unresponsive, distant, oligarchic, wasteful and incompetent in their management responsibilities. Such views often derived from personal experience of the way their housing had been managed and the way complaints had been dealt with. At a conference

²⁹ These are gleaned from interviews, observation work and secondary sources.

organised by the tenants' agents in November 1991 to discuss housing management issues under the council and under the HAT, for example, the organisers argued that the greater knowledge the tenants had of housing management, the greater the likelihood the tenants would be able to make effective demands on their landlords. Many tenants were sceptical, reflected in the case of one tenant who argued that 'demands on the council have not worked before, ...all the petitions'! Tenants were on the whole very aware of the factors which determined rent levels but they suggested strongly that management waste especially voids and rent arrears accounted for a significant part of the costs to tenants.

The first challenge faced by the tenants in the proposed HAT was to secure the right to vote over whether they wanted to go under the HAT or not. They did not want to rely on the council's vote on the matter. Tenants felt that they should be the ones who decided, since the policy affected them. They felt that the council should be responsive to their needs. In October 1991 the council did indeed vote to respect their right to decide. But many tenants remained wary. At block level the tenants felt that historically their needs had been neglected. Regarding rents and service charges one tenant commented that 'we pay so much a year for decorating in the communal area - but it's God knows how many years since it was done!

It's not on... We need some accountability'³⁰. Some individuals on the council were regarded as having a higher level of credibility than others. The knowledge that Harry Rimmer - the leader of the council - had been elected to the Shadow HAT as one of the council's representatives was welcomed, for example³¹. Harry Rimmer is a tenant in a high rise flat himself and, partly for this reason, was seen as having credibility and an understanding of the issues facing tenants in the blocks.

It was common to find tenants viewing the local authority in ways which accorded with the view of local government as representative, pluralistic and democratic, as described by Lowe. I have already noted that the council was seen as bureaucratic, oligarchic, wasteful and distant. The point to note is that both types of views were often held simultaneously. Indeed, a return to the council remains the ideal scenario for many tenants. There is a widespread belief that the council is not to blame for the state of the 'multies'. Declining subsidies, high interest charges, inflation, the architects and other factors, largely outside the control of the council, were seen as the major cause of the poor state of the blocks. Indeed many tenants were perplexed because they did not see why the government could not simply give the council enough

³⁰ Noted during the HAT Workshop 21.11.91 held at Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service.

³¹ Steering Committee Meeting 18th December, 1991.

money to 'do up' the blocks avoiding the need for a HAT. The council was regarded as being best placed to know what their needs were, to a greater extent than 'some civil servant in Whitehall'. It was felt that the council would be more concerned to keep rents down and to be able to assess the non-housing needs and wants of the local community which essentially affect their experience of housing.

I have acknowledged the problems associated with researching ideologies affecting the organisation of the tenants facing the Liverpool HAT. Nevertheless it was very clear that the local authority, central government, together with other groups including political parties at national and local level, were sending 'messages' to the tenants in Liverpool. These messages undoubtedly affected their mobilisation, the vote and tenants' perceptions of the future for their housing. We may now examine some of these messages. On the national level, central government was promoting a version of 'consumer sovereignty'³², initially through the 'right to buy', under the 1980 Housing Act, and later through 'Tenants' Choice' and the rhetoric which accompanied the passage of the 1988 Housing Act through Parliament. The 1980's legislation relating to

³² As a normative principle consumer sovereignty asserts that 'the performance of any economy ought to be evaluated in terms of how well it fulfils the wants of its consumers' (Rothenberg, 1968: 327). See Rothenberg for an interesting critique of the way the concept has been misused.

housing and local government may be understood by its references to efficiency in local affairs, or the commitment to consumer choice may be regarded as being symbolic rather than real (Parkinson, 1988). Nevertheless, it must be accepted that the promotion of tenants' rights was attractive to many, even those who were more sceptical about the government's commitment. Tenants were prepared to use these promises as a lever to further their own interests.

Tenants were correct to be sceptical. In its draft stages the legislation appeared as a crude mechanism to remove housing from local authority control and to place it in the hands of private landlords, whom the government had given commitments to assist (see Shaugnessy 1989). Tenants' scepticism was inflamed by the governments' initial refusal to allow tenants to vote on the proposals, although, following pressure, the government conceded this on the 6th of November 1988. It can also be noted that the Liverpool tenants were able to draw on the experience of tenants in Waltham Forest who had already voted to become tenants of a HAT.

In order to understand the mobilisation of Liverpool tenants in the case of the Housing Action Trust we need to set the terms of the debate in the context of central-local relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In particular, we need to situate this event within the

shifting axis of power between central and local government housing policy. Having already gone some way towards a discussion of the changing nature of central-local relations, I would like to elaborate a different facet of central-local relations in relation to the local and national Labour Party.

Central-local relations have been fundamental in shaping the actions taken by tenants, especially from the Housing Finance Act (1972). As we have seen, centrally imposed housing policies led to the famous central-local conflict between the Conservative government and Clay Cross. In the contemporary situation in Liverpool we need to set the scene for the tenants' struggle by acknowledging that the council (under the control of Militant) was involved in a bitter dispute with central government, especially over housing policy, through the mid 1980s. The new pragmatic leadership of the late 1980s early 1990s did not openly oppose central policy. But the recent political history of the city did have an impact on the way that tenants organised. Many tenants said they felt that if they voted for the HAT the government would see it more as a political point than a way to resolve the state of the 'multies'. Moreover, active tenants who favoured the HAT, because it was the only reasonable way of securing improvements, felt that if it was political points the government was seeking, this could be achieved without running to the expense of renovating 71 blocks. Half this

number could achieve the same aim. Many tenants worried that the Department of the Environment was taking steps to try to find out if there were some blocks likely to vote against the HAT in order that they could be removed from the proposed HAT. In this context the numbers voting for the change in ownership and control would favour the government. Secondly, the Department could make savings on its expenditure assessment. There were many rumours that the DoE was soliciting this information. Tenant activists as a result spent time dealing with the worries of their constituents, thus having an impact upon their mobilisation.

The recent political history of Liverpool has also seen conflict between the central and local Labour Party. This conflict culminated but was not ended by the expulsion of a number of local party activists for their involvement in the Militant Tendency in 1987³³. More recently relations between the national and local Labour Party have been more conciliatory and co-operative compared to the period between 1983 and 1988. But there has nevertheless been confusion between Walworth Road and the local level over the appropriate response to the HAT proposal. The local party promoted the policy as the only reasonable way

³³ This followed 47 Councillors being surcharged and disqualified from office by the High Court in 1987. The 47 were members of the Revolutionary Socialist League, Militant and fellow travellers. They were brought to the attention of the courts for their failure to set a rate in the allocated time period (*The Sunday Times* 6th January, 1991; *The Guardian* 23rd of March 1989 p5).

to deal with its high rise housing problem. The response from the national Labour Party was at first confused, and then delayed. At another time this may not have been too significant but in this case the delay coincided with the run up to the General Election of April 1992, and Labour held the lead in the opinion polls. The Labour Party's response was critically important to the Liverpool tenants; there were doubts about whether a new Labour government would go ahead with what was essentially Tory housing policy and de-municipalisation. The tenants needed to know what the national Party's position was before both ballots. They felt that a vote for the HAT, without clarification for the Labour Party's position may have meant a wasted vote.

At first the (national) Labour Party's response to the Liverpool HAT was to say that they would terminate it if they won the April General Election. Members of the High Rise Group were very disappointed with this decision when they were informed in December 1991. The Steering Committee felt the situation to be unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, they wanted the right to vote for or against the HAT; they wanted to vote on the understanding that the HAT would aim improve their properties over a period of five, six, seven or ten years. Secondly, since the policy had been proposed by the (Labour) city council, the tenants saw no reason for the national Labour Party to disagree with the local party's assessment of what was

required. There were no new policies or funding mechanisms proposed by the Labour Party to replace the proposed HAT and many Liverpool tenants felt there were few options for their properties. By March 1992, however, the national Labour Party had altered its position. George Howarth (Labour's Housing Spokesperson) gave an assurance that if a democratic ballot had taken place, or is in its advanced stages at the time of the Election, and if the Labour Party was to take power, then he would support their decision. The tenants believed that the Labour Party had altered its position on HATs largely as a result of the way the legislation had been used by other tenants, and had been significantly altered in content between Assent and implementation. By this time there were already two HATs in progress (in Hull and Waltham Forest), a proposed HAT for Liverpool meant that the Labour Party needed to arrive at a position on Housing Action Trusts. Once a decision had been made the Labour Party could defend it largely because of tenant action. The national Labour Party's position on the HAT was important to the tenants' mobilisation in the context of the run up to the General Election of 1992. The General Election was, however, to have other important implications for the High Rise tenants.

When the City Council proposed the HAT they hoped that arrangements could be made for a November 1991 ballot. The ballot finally took place in July 1992. In the intervening

nine months uncertainty about the timing of the vote had an important impact upon the tenants involved. Initially the delay was functional; it allowed the HRG to strengthen its negotiating stance by gathering and disseminating more information about the changes to their tenancies, and defining their requirements. Later, however, the delay and postponement of the ballot's announcement was more damaging; it effected the HRG's organisation, relationship with tenants and the city council.

By December 1991 the HRG expected the date for the ballot to be announced shortly after Christmas, and while this constituted a delay from the time the City Council had hoped the ballot would take place, the tenants were seeking to delay the ballot 'to get more information across to tenants and in order to make more people aware of the issues before the vote takes place'³⁴. A delay would allow the tenants time to work out their demands more fully. Nevertheless, the tenants did not want the ballot to be delayed much after March 1992.

At the Steering Group meeting of the 11th of December 1991 concern was expressed that the DoE and the Merseyside Task Force were seeking information from various people about the blocks most willing to support a HAT. Tenants feared a hidden agenda where the DoE may cut the cost by trimming the HAT. Indeed, this was felt, at least in part,

³⁴ HRG Steering Group meeting 11th December 1991.

to account for the delay on behalf of the DoE in announcing the date of the ballot.

The delay initially provided tenants and agents with the time to conduct surveys of tenant opinion and experience in all the blocks and to work on the Tenants' Expectation Document (later the Joint Statement). By Christmas, however, no one expected the ballot to take place before February 1992. The HRG anticipated an April ballot. Expectations grew only to be dashed by another delay - negative effects started to become evident. Meetings called to make arrangements for the ballot with the block representatives were cancelled because the steering group had nothing to report. Those who, on the whole, favoured the HAT feared a delay beyond the General Election (which was about to be announced at any time) might result in wasted energy should their efforts be discarded by the national Labour Party which found little to favour the policy at that time. Still, refinements to the Joint Statement, voting arrangements and representatives for the Shadow HAT were able to be sorted out in good time.

Exhibitions took place on the blocks through January 1992 in an attempt to keep information flowing from the HRG to tenants. No news came to the HRG regarding the date of the ballot, and as a result there were no meetings with tenants on the blocks; it would waste tenants' time, there

was nothing to report. Surgeries continued to be held by the 'tenants' friends'. Most of February followed without news and with an absence of meetings. Fears of a decline in interest on behalf of the tenants and an interruption to the momentum were articulated among the HRG. In addition, the likelihood of funding for the agents running out before the ballot became a distinct possibility. This, it was feared, would result in stretched in resources at a time when the tenants needed them most. It was now widely believed that the ballot would 'almost certainly be delayed until after the General Election'³⁵.

On the 26th of February, however, Sir George Young announced that the ballot for the HAT, covering 71 of the City's tower blocks, would take place over three weeks from the 25th of May. Sir George added that 'there is a greater likelihood of a direct solution if the tenants have control over the money rather than the local authority' (Radio City 12pm News). He omitted to mention the role of the HAT Board in controlling the money, but he did say that he was making an extra £7 million available to housing associations in Merseyside. Was this a pre-election 'sweetener'? The local newspaper, the *Echo*, added some clarification when its article *Tenants Set to Vote on Tower Power Switch* qualified the announcement with the news that the date was provisional, subject to postponement in the event of a General Election being called on 9th April. The

³⁵ Interview 17th February, 1993.

Labour Party had still not clarified their position at this time.

By early March the Labour Party's position had been clarified. But the 9th of April Election led to the postponement of the ballot until (possibly) the 20th July (all parties apart from the Housing Minister, George Young, had agreed to this date³⁶). The delay was certainly taking its toll on the Group. By June some of the more active tenants were both anxious and 'cheesed off'. This was reflected in low attendance at meetings on the blocks. Although informal impressions earlier in the campaign gave credence to the view that the tenants would vote positively in relation to the HAT, the mood was now more difficult to assess. The momentum had been lost and the activists found it difficult to motivate the less active tenants.

The delay in announcing the ballot and the subsequent postponement had two other main effects. Firstly it added weight to the popular view that the DoE was benefitting from the delay, and had an interest in prolonging it, as the decline in interest from the tenants gave rise to a belief that some blocks at least would vote against the HAT, thereby allowing the D.o.E to 'trim the HAT', save money, and still score political points against Liverpool City Council in particular and local authorities in general. Secondly, the uncertainty about whether a HAT

³⁶ Interview 3rd June, 1992.

would go ahead or not, together with recognition of the possibility to save scarce resources, resulted in the City Council curtailing their programmed and (some) cyclical maintenance/repairs³⁷. Roof renewal, window renewal, external painting, lift renewal 'and other works associated with planned maintenance would also be curtailed'³⁸. This action, did not endear the council to the tenants. The Council also had to defend itself against a hostile press who suggested that no repairs were taking place. Thus it can be suggested that the delay, and the way that it was used by the various sets of actors, served to influence the tenants' organisational practices and to illuminate the fact that they were responding to an agenda set by bodies with far more power than they.

In this context the strategies the High Rise Group used became of great importance as the tenants attempted to use what power and political resources they could draw upon. I have indicated that the tenants' main concerns were associated with the right to 'have a say' in whether or not all or some of the blocks should go under the HAT. Tenants wanted to have an input into the nature of the improvements once the HAT had been designated and approved. Maintaining and securing their tenancy rights during the HAT period and after, including the right to return to the

³⁷ Meeting between the High Rise Steering Committee and the Director of Housing 12th December 1991.

³⁸ Letter from Director of Maintenance and Building Works to the Director of Housing 12th December, 1991.

council, remained fundamental priorities. Initially the tenants needed to secure the right to vote with the City Council. Although, once this was done, the City Council on the whole took a passive but supportive role in relation to the HAT. Later the tenants (through the HRG) found some conflict with the national Labour Party, and there was, at the very least, the appearance of conflict with the DoE as many believed there were attempts to 'trim the HAT'.

We could add that demands for the right to go back to the council after the HAT was against government thinking. Karn has described how the Housing Action Trust policy was remodelled from its form in the 1987 White Paper to when the Liverpool tenants voted in July 1992 (Karn, 1993). The change appears very significant in Karn's work, reflected in the fact that during the first phase of HATs local authorities were to be 'diminished and humiliated' (Karn, 1993: 75) and denied an input regarding the designation of estates in their areas. But during the last phase described by Karn a more conciliatory position, of 'partnership' between the DoE, local authorities and tenants, is evident.

The Government are now anxious to work as hard as possible to ensure that, where HATs are proposed, that is done on the basis of collaboration and partnership. We do not want any of the adversarial politics that, sadly, were interjected into some of the earlier proposals, mainly by people who were politically dogmatic and committed against HATs (House of Commons Debates 10 July, 1991 col. 960 cited in Karn, 1993: 87).

Nevertheless it seems that the change was not simply one of heart but rather a rational response in the light of implementation problems (Karn, 1993). If the government was genuinely responding to local authorities and tenants an easier solution would have been to allocate funding to local authorities through their HIP or Estate Action, or other such mechanism. Instead local authorities were still regarded as incompetent to the task of managing the rehabilitation of their housing. Moreover, while those following the debate over HATs, from its Bill stage through to the deal agreed by tenants in Waltham Forest, would be aware of changes made to the policy many people were unable to follow these developments and perceived the policy according to its original intentions. Clearly the Labour Party was unaware of the situation in the run up to the April 1992 General Election when they remained opposed to HATs. Many tenants occupied a similar position. Although assurances had been given to tenants in other HAT schemes, the *legislation* has essentially remained the same, leaving much to the discretion of the Minister. There was, therefore, a struggle over information, and over the meaning of a HAT.

What were the strategies used by the tenants to achieve their aims and to strengthen their bargaining power? The HRG used techniques of negotiation, rather than direct action (eg withholding of rent) backed up by structures which showed those with whom the tenants were in

negotiation that there was strength in numbers and, moreover, that the steering group responsible for the negotiations was both representative and democratic. The tenants also took the 'rhetoric of consumerism' and asked those with whom they were in negotiation to 'live up to their argument'³⁹. The language of 'accountability' was used as a lever.

The tenants had to develop new skills to support their negotiations. In response to the threat of a 'trimmed down HAT', for example, and in an attempt to give *all* the tenants in the proposed HAT the right to choose the policy, or reject it, the HRG needed to demonstrate the existence of widespread support for that right. If this was to be achieved by showing a high level of mobilisation, they needed to employ organisers and researchers; to acquire management skills and knowledge of fund raising. They had to develop committee and communication skills, although tenant activists involved in previous struggles would pass on these skills. Public speaking, budgeting, and lobbying are always requirements for people involved in consumption sector struggles. In this context the tenants in Liverpool had to familiarise themselves with the skills needed to obtain information and analyze data from the new decision-making bodies which now existed in the city-region. They needed to disseminate often complex pieces of central government legislation to large numbers of tenants, they

³⁹ Interview 11th December, 1991.

had to understand the rationales behind such policies in general and the implications for the Liverpool tenants in particular. This itself has often become a personal and political education for those involved. The HRG needed to obtain a knowledge of the agencies they were likely to come into contact with, as well as the local authority. The HRG also had to learn ways of gaining access to the media to disseminate information and to strengthen their bargaining power.

Information gathering and dissemination was critical to their campaign. The Liverpool tenants were assisted by links with tenants who had undergone similar processes. Lessons were learned and passed on through activists not only in the city-region but also through struggles elsewhere nationally. The HRG (steering committee) held meetings with the Waltham Forest tenants and visited the proposed HAT sites. HRG personnel also visited Loughborough Estates, Lambeth, and met with representatives of Old and New Loughborough Tenants' Association (ONLTA). In the notes the HRG made during the visit it was recorded that

The tenants from these estates had rejected a HAT when the government proposed such a scheme in 1989. The tenants were concerned about the lack of accountability of the proposed HAT Board and attempted to obtain guarantees from the then Secretary of State Nicholas Ridley. A delegation from the estates met with him but failed to secure any assurances from what [was] described as an often 'abusive' meeting. They were told by

Mr Ridley that the HAT proposals would basically be imposed upon them and no other funding would be forthcoming to regenerate the estates. The local authority had already had a number of proposals refused by the Department of the Environment and the tenants felt that the Secretary of State was holding a gun to their heads... Their response was to refuse to have anything to do with the HAT proposals or any personnel connected to the scheme.

A vigorous ant-HAT campaign was mounted by the tenants and the Secretary of State was petitioned about his refusal to allow consultation with the tenants and the lack of guarantees surrounding the HAT.

ONLTA Tenants sent a letter to Michael Spicer, Nicholas Ridley's successor, explaining their reasons for their rejection of the proposals, but they did not receive a reply. ONLTA later learned that the DoE had withdrawn its proposals for the area.

The HRG said that they gained a great deal from the experiences of Waltham Forest and the Lambeth tenants. They were able to build on these experiences. Indeed it was necessary for the HRG to translate these experiences into the Liverpool situation. Liverpool's was a special case not least because the proposed Liverpool HAT, containing 71 tower blocks, was the biggest ever proposed. Unlike in Waltham Forest and Lambeth, the blocks were not concentrated in a specific geographical area but were spread right across the city. In Waltham Forest and Lambeth there were low rise developments as well as high rise. In the Liverpool HAT, because it included so many

high rise blocks, tenancies were potentially more expensive because service charges would reflect the greater expenditure required for renovation and the up-keep of the communal areas. Rents increasingly reflect management and maintenance costs since the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act and the improvements desired would need to be tempered with what was considered to be affordable. Indeed, the HRG visited a council block, Sunningdale, on the Wirral in December 1991 in order to 'see what was possible'⁴⁰. Tenants saw a flagship development for Wirral Council which had been improved using a variety of funding sources (including Estate Action, Urban Programme, and EC monies). The Liverpool tenants were impressed by the high standard of renovation, the security arrangements and the relatively low rents (only 40p per week more than most tenants in the high rise blocks in Liverpool were paying at that time). But the Liverpool tenants doubted that what they saw was available to them. The nature of the stock, its scale and distribution also had implications for the HRG, its organisation *vis a vis* the tenancy and, indeed, the practicalities of conducting the ballot. The scale of the project will mean that the HAT will need to consider problems of co-ordinating work across the large number of units (5,500) on a number of sites. Other differences between the localities visited by the HRG, aside from the Sunningdale project which was not part of a change of

⁴⁰ Reported during a meeting at Sheil Park 11th December, 1991.

ownership proposal, may be seen in terms of the economic state of the regions concerned. Tenants on the Loughborough Estates in Lambeth, for example, feared the prospect of private landlords being able, or wanting, to take over the property. In Liverpool this was not a realistic possibility.

Liverpool's economic difficulties, represented not least in the fact that in July 1993 the area was approved for Objective One status as one of the poorest areas in Europe, to some extent sets the city apart from the case of Waltham Forest, although council tenants in general, and those on residual estates in particular, tend to be economically marginal. The economic situation in Merseyside means that the possibility of other landlords taking over the properties is not seen by decision-makers in Liverpool (in the short or medium term, at least). This may be a possibility in other localities. Practical arguments therefore favour the blocks returning to the council. It appears that the government has pledged to introduce a statutory right for the tenants to vote to return to the council (Black, 1993). Although it is likely that housing associations will be seen as the preferred landlords. This must be seen as a concession won from central government, albeit in the context of legislation which was a proven failure and the less openly confrontational Major government, especially when compared

with the property take-over in Runcorn. It is to this case that we must now turn.

The Runcorn Tenants' Federation: struggles over occupancy and ownership in Runcorn New Town

A review of the tenant actions in Runcorn from the mid 1980s through the fieldwork period will illustrate the themes and arguments presented earlier in the chapter. In particular, the importance of the material bases of tenure in resident and tenant action will be shown. The significance of including suppliers in what may be considered to be the 'socialised sector' but which is not conventionally included in analyses supporting the two-tenure dichotomy (that owned by development corporations) will be acknowledged in this section. The study of the struggle over the ownership and control of domestic property in Runcorn will illustrate the contingent nature of effective mobilisation and action. It will also show the significance of the need to study historically and spatially determined social, organisational and political relations in order to understand these processes. The Runcorn example was one aimed at central government and a 'QUANGOCRACY' in the form of the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation (popularly known as DEVCO).

The Runcorn New Town was proposed under the New Town Initiative of 1964. The Runcorn Development Corporation was established in 1965 and the first estate was started in

Halton Brook. This was primarily intended to house those who would be involved in the construction of the New Town and was generally inhabited by skilled people and their families. It was intended to be a free standing New Town in its own right, supporting and attracting industry and a settled population, in addition to re-housing people from Liverpool's inner-cities. The last site to be completed, Windmill Hill, was finished in 1984. By this time the Town had been in decline for at least ten years following the economic downturn of the mid 1970s and the onset of stagnation. In the mid 1980s the Development Corporation (from 1981 the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation as the two Corporations merged) was managing ten thousand and five hundred properties, and a debate was emerging on the issue of the accountability of the Development Corporation QUANGOs.

Many estates contain a mix of tenures, the Development Corporation designated areas for owner-occupation at the onset, and tenants have exercised their right-to-buy more recently. On the Brow estate for example, over 60% of the stock had been sold at the time of the fieldwork. But estates vary widely in desirability and quality. Southgate, for example, was built between 1969 and 1977 by the RIBA Gold Medalist James Stirling and comprised 1355 dwellings of unconventional design: 1,100 deck access flats and maisonettes in 5 storey blocks, and 255 two and three storey terraced houses. All the problems of public sector

architecture of the period are found in Southgate; the use of system building techniques, non-traditional materials (such as concrete, glass and reinforced plastic), high densities, an oil-fired district heating system which was extremely expensive for its inhabitants, poor garden provision, surplus public open space, and an aerial walkway system which separates pedestrian and other traffic. The estate has an appearance of multi-coloured port-a-loos stacked against and on-top of each other. The estate is commonly referred to as 'lego-land'. Dwellings have round windows and little 'defensible space'. It is difficult to imagine living here. The knowledge that demand for homes on Southgate fell steadily evokes little surprise. A high turnover of tenants and a high level of voids grew along with problems of graffiti and vandalism. Condensation and poor security has been an enduring feature of this estate.

The economic decline of Runcorn, combined with the poor urban environment and limited facilities on some of the estates, meant that many of those being allocated housing in Runcorn were no longer the skilled and semi-skilled workers the Development Corporation expected at the beginning (as part of a more general policy of mixing social classes). Increasingly, certain estates became 'dumping grounds for people with little housing choice'⁴¹. Now Runcorn is inhabited by skilled working people who moved in during the early years when the economy was more

⁴¹ Group Interview 1st May 1992 at the Runcorn Federation.

buoyant, and also by people who occupy a marginal position in relation to the labour market, they have few housing options and have been allocated poor dwellings on 'sink' estates.

Some of the estates are popular and this is reflected in the numbers of tenants who have taken up the right-to-buy. Others are poor, as in the case of Southgate. Indeed, in 1985 Southgate was ranked first in Cheshire County Council's Family Stress report on overall social stress indicators in Cheshire (out of 207 areas). Using indicators such as free school meals, unemployment, community service orders and child abuse, Southgate came first; and ranked second for social services referrals and probation orders. Tenants perceive different status positions between the different groups of tenants on the estate, but there was insufficient evidence to show an impact on the tenants' organisation. We may note, finally, in relation to the social composition of the tenants in Runcorn, that few black people inhabit the estates. The most visible form of ethnicity in the locality is seen in the form of religious allegiance: Catholicism and Protestantism. Both religious groups have been catered for by the planners who ensured that each estate has easy access to churches and schools catering for each.

The Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation has documented the actions of tenants and residents in Runcorn

for the right to determine which landlords would take over their properties and what would happen to their properties after the takeover. But unlike the High Rise Group the role of the local authority does not figure prominently. Its impact upon the tenants' organisation was minimal. In other New Town areas local authorities have taken over property but Halton Council, having studied the proposition and the costs involved (a rent rise of at least £15 per week across the borough), felt the project to be prohibitive and unfair. The council could not accept the housing and they were not encouraged to do so. This is not surprising given central government's ideological opposition to local authorities. Instead, between 1983 and 1985 private sector developers and housing associations were invited by DEVCO to make proposals for the redevelopment of estates such as Southgate and to submit feasibility studies. At this time, however, little else was done about the estates and the property remained in the control of the Development Corporation. Meanwhile an emerging debate, initiated by Mrs Thatcher, was criticising the QUANGOCRACY, especially organisations like the development corporations.

In 1987 an announcement was made that DEVCO would be wound up in the following two years. Because the council was unable to bid only three alternatives remained: that the estates would be sold off to a consortium of private investment agencies (such as banks and building societies

etc); that the DEVCO workers would privatize and set up a company and bid for the stock; or that a group of housing associations would take over the stock⁴². The Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation notes that if these options were considered to be unacceptable the dwellings would be handed over to the Commission for New Towns (Management Body) on a temporary basis, to be sold off later, estate by estate.

The concern felt by tenants resulted in the formation of the Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation in March 1987, and tenants and residents mobilised to protect their tenancy rights. Many rumours circulated over the future of the housing. One of the main priorities articulated by the organised tenants' groups was to obtain accurate information and to disseminate it to residents and tenants in the New Town.

Community associations, residents' and tenants' groups had been formed as people settled on the newly built estates. Halton Brook, the first estate, mentioned earlier, had a residents' association from the 1960s, although activists say that the Development Corporation never took the organisation seriously and it was active only spasmodically. Other estates had organised tenants' and residents' associations for many years, for example in Murdishaw groups had been organised at least since the

⁴² Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation *Past Present and Future* 1990 p2.

early 1970s. However, contemporary activists indicated that these associations were often very parochial in nature, remaining isolated from each other, often unaware of the existence of other associations, and were unable to benefit from mutual support. Indeed they had few issues over which to unite. But as the rumours to take over the Runcorn properties developed into a firm proposal many of these groups became united and politicised. Contact was made with known groups and other organisations, and public meetings were held with the view to establishing a residents' federation. The inaugural meeting stated that a federation would be established with the following aim:-

The object of the federation shall be to involve New Town Residents without distinction of age, sex, race, political, religious or other opinions in a common effort to improve conditions of life in Runcorn and to foster community spirit.

Those estates without an existing tenants' or residents' association received help from local councillors who organised public meetings.

The newly formed federation⁴³ held meetings with the Development Corporation on the future of the housing stock. This body, not surprisingly, believed that the second option, that the DEVCO workers would privatize, set up a company and bid for the stock, was the best option for the New Town. Tenants, represented through the Fed., having had years of experience of their management, thought not.

⁴³ Referred to as 'the Fed'.

Instead, they were aware that several housing associations were interested in the properties and, on balance, there was a preference for these organisations. These housing associations became known as the Runcorn Housing Association Group (RUNHAG). The practical difficulties of managing an area the size of the New Town meant that the housing associations would divide the New Town up between them. Community Development Services (CDS) would take over a third of Castlefields and the Brow estates; LHT would take over two-thirds of Castlefields and Windmill Hill; Liver Housing Association would take over Brookvale; MIH would take over Southgate, Palacefields, Halton Brook and houses acquired by the Development Corporation; Stockbridge Village Housing Association would take over Murdishaw; while Young Person's Housing Association (YPHA) would manage Halton Lodge and Ellesmere Street.

The Fed. found the Development Corporation unhelpful and critical of the tenants' position⁴⁴. Their only option was to lobby the Department of Environment at central government level. The Federation organised letters to be sent to the Minister and visits to the Department. Meetings were held and tenants lobbied the Minister until backing was granted for the RUNHAG to approach residents for their approval.

⁴⁴ Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation *Past Present and Future 1990*.

Housing Associations held meetings and discussions with tenants on the respective estates and a 'courtship' began. Tenants and residents were taken to view houses the respective associations managed in Merseyside. The residents of Murdishaw, however, found that they could not approve Stockbridge Village Housing Association as the landlord for their area. Residents doubted the record of Stockbridge Village as a landlord. A visit to Stockbridge Village was undertaken, representatives reported that they were appalled by what they saw. A public meeting was held back in Murdishaw where the prospective landlord was rejected. Murdishaw's residents' and tenants' group was a relatively inexperienced lobbying organisation, but with the support of the Federation they lobbied MPs and Ministers, used the local press, and lobbied other associations to rid themselves of the threat of being taken over by an undesirable landlord⁴⁵.

The other landlords were busy 'courting' the tenants and by early 1989 were requesting a ballot of the New Town tenants 'saying that they would not take on the housing stock if they did not have the backing of the clear majority of tenants'⁴⁶. In comparison to DEVCO, many active tenants felt that the housing associations would make excellent landlords. The housing associations were

⁴⁵ Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation *Past Present and Future 1990*.

⁴⁶ Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation (1990: 7).

keen to expand their stock, and were keen therefore to attract the support of residents. The RUNHAG tried to sell themselves to the tenants, using the issue of accountability and drawing on the lack of accountability of DEVCO⁴⁷. The housing associations were keen to make promises. Tenants campaigned to ensure they were guarantees. The tenants lobbied for retention of their rights of tenure as they existed under DEVCO, and the housing associations pledged to retain them. A tenants' charter was drawn up: tenants retained the right to buy and to have rents set by the rents officer. There was 'almost a partnership between the tenants and the housing associations'⁴⁸. But the future was by no means clear; if the housing associations did not take over the properties, for one reason or another, one of the other options (noted above) would be pursued. Activists believed that in this event the Commission for New Towns would take over the management of estates which would then be sold off, estate by estate. Secondly, legal hitches, such as the failure to guarantee secure tenancies, interrupted the process leading to the ballot, but the housing associations were eventually accepted in a ballot in November/December 1989.

⁴⁷ Interview 1st May, 1992. Although the issue of housing association accountability was about to be raised publicly, see Chapter Six.

⁴⁸ Interview 1st May, 1992.

After the long courtship, the 'honeymoon was soon over'⁴⁹. The alliance had served its purpose. The interests of the tenants (securing valuable property rights and allaying fears about the future of their housing) and those of the housing associations (the accumulation of revenue and asset bases) had been protected. We may note an instrumental attitude to tenant organisation, as Lowe suggested, that is, tenants followed the line of least resistance, only organising formally when other agencies failed to represent their interests. We may also note that tenants organised with other agencies, some of whom appeared to be strange bedfellows, when it served their short or medium term goals.

The residents' and tenants' associations under the Fed., have now entered a new phase. The Fed. in their publication *Past Present and Future* note however that

One cannot go into the future without reflecting on the past. Our achievements and mistakes. The disappointments, the traumas, successes and elation. The happenings of the past have shown our weaknesses and strengths and with the DEVCO's departure, we have gone through a phase of self analysis and as a result, it is with more wisdom, expertise and optimism that we enter the future (page 11).

Their aim at the time of the fieldwork was to make the landlords deliver their promise of tenant/resident involvement and participation and to be accountable.

⁴⁹ Interview 1st May, 1992.

Tenants and residents want to secure environmental improvements and to increase the flow of information to and from tenants, the Federation and the landlords. Tenants have the stated aim of building on the unity developed during the struggle and to foster the sense of community through community activities. They have the declared aim of co-operating with statutory bodies and organisations but stress that they are not afraid of confrontation where necessary. The residents' associations, and the Fed., say they now have different interests from the housing associations. The former are lobbyists and are active in maintaining pressure for tenant involvement in decision-making⁵⁰. Estate residents' associations lobby their respective landlords, and if satisfaction is not gained the issue is taken to the Federation whose role has become more prominent as the respective roles have developed. The Fed. is regarded as an important debating forum and an advice and support resource. Importantly, it is regarded as a highly sophisticated lobbying organisation by residents and landlords (and indeed other agencies) alike⁵¹.

The complexity and the politics of organisational relationships associated with the take over of the

⁵⁰ Tenants have secured the right to hire and fire contractors, a high level of input into the design of buildings under development and improvements in planned maintenance, along with a more general involvement in housing management.

⁵¹ Interview 1st May 1992.

properties in the New Town were clearly demonstrated in 1989 when DEVCO took a decision to demolish Southgate against the wishes of the community there. The event illustrated the nature of central-local relations as they manifested in this locality. The decision came as the Runcorn Housing Association Group (RUNHAG) were liaising with the tenants and it illustrated DEVCO's lack of accountability and responsiveness to residents of Southgate in particular and Runcorn in general. It further illustrated the importance of gaining access to information and decision-making structures. From the Fed.'s documentation it appears that DEVCO, despite not being the preferred landlords for the take-over of the properties, nevertheless had ambitions to take over the stock. In this vein DEVCO commissioned a report (the Chesterton Report) to value the New Town's stock. As a result of the valuation it was decided that Southgate would be too costly to renovate and should, therefore, be demolished. Coinciding with these developments were changes in the rules for bidding for the New Town's stock which would allow Halton Borough Council to bid for the properties, previously believed to be an impossibility. In order to consider this possibility, the Council requested a copy of the Report, but was denied access to it. An injunction was sought on behalf of the Council and DEVCO eventually let the council see the report and the case was dropped. The legal action meant that members and officers of the local authority were forbidden from speaking to residents' and tenants' groups

about the issue as doing so could prejudice the Council's case in court.

The residents were in uproar; the loss of housing stock from Southgate would mean families could not be re-housed near relatives, there would be a net loss of social housing stock from the New Town and communities would be divided. At that time Halton Borough Council's waiting list was in excess of 4,000. The residents mounted a campaign against DEVCO for redevelopment and local rehousing. It was widely believed that DEVCO had acted illegally in failing to consult them. Chaired by Margaret Davies, the Southgate Residents' Association (with the help of the Fed. and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service, TPAS) lobbied David Trippier both at the House of Commons and in his constituency and carried out surveys, which showed the residents wanted to stay in a redeveloped Southgate. The tenants won public and organisational support from a range of agencies through the use of local and national media (newspapers, radio and TV). The Fed.'s documents indicate that DEVCO and the Government were not prepared for the strength of feeling the issue generated. Their campaign resulted in a qualified success, the decision that Southgate would be demolished in phases and 650 houses would be built, 300 for rent and 350 for sale. MIH would manage the process.

Many tenants were unaware that the local authority was interested in the Runcorn properties but was prevented from bidding because of unfavourable terms. They were also unfamiliar with the changes in the law which may have allowed it to do so. Residents were suspicious of the council's motives but could not have the situation clarified because of the injunction. It transpired, however, that the council would be prevented from bidding even if they had considered it a feasible possibility. The cumulated effect of these events on the Southgate Residents' Association, and other organised tenants, is clearly reflected in Runcorn New town Residents' Federation *Past, Present and Future*

The DEVCO's decision to demolish Southgate and withhold the Chesterton Report were extremely traumatic for the members of the Federation. Rumours were rife, information was difficult to come by, tensions were caused between associations, the elected councillors and the Housing Associations, and for a while the future looked very uncertain. The DEVCO had already privatised part of the Housing Management. The motives for taking the steps they did could be interpreted as a last and final step to set themselves up as an 'ideal landlord'. However, the residents in the New Town had 21 years of their management style, and felt that their best interests could be served by the Runhag group - a view eventually shared by the Secretary of State (page 8-9).

While a consumption sector analysis may militate against viewing owner-occupiers and tenants as allies in a struggle over the ownership and control of domestic

property, and certainly against including it in the same terms of reference, as Ball (1983) noted, this study has demonstrated the importance of recognising and studying such alliances. DEVCO tenants, later voluntary sector tenants, and owner-occupiers were allied and active together throughout the whole period. Runcorn always had a considerable owner-occupied sector as I have already indicated. They inhabited the same neighbourhoods and could effectively claim to be part of the same communities. Indeed the whole New Town initiative was advocated partly in response to a 'philosophy of community'⁵². Owner-occupiers and tenants shared fears that their communities would be broken up. Owner-occupiers and tenants were concerned to maximise the use-values of their neighbourhood, and both shared *material* interests. In a group interview at the Federation on the 1st of May 1992 it was forcefully pointed out that owner-occupiers as well as tenants have interests in maintaining the estates, ensuring the improvement of estates and in fostering the 'sense of community'. The tenants on the estate committees and steering groups, as well as on the Federation insist that owner-occupiers are represented. Respondents added that decisions made by DEVCO, and now the housing associations, affect owner-occupiers; the way the 'dowry' is administered, for example. The £23m 'dowry' given to the housing associations from central government funds at the

⁵² See Heraud (1975) for a discussion of the philosophy of community and the New Towns.

time of the take-over was calculated partly in terms of the balance of housing types. It was assumed to last for 35 years, part of which was to go into a sinking fund for the owner-occupiers - for landscaping for instance. The Runcorn example, therefore, makes manifest actions taken by housing consumers who are defined outside the traditional bi-tenure dichotomy and the alliances between those differently placed in relation to the means of housing.

In Runcorn the role of the local authority was relatively marginal. Despite the absence of democratic traditions in Runcorn, in relation to the local authority, DEVCO, the housing associations, and other agencies with whom the residents had relationships, the tenants felt that they needed to show that they were democratic and that their organisations were mouthpieces of the general residency, in order to be taken seriously. Like the HRG, the Runcorn residents' groups acquired skills and developed strategies in the course of their action and through the links forged with other groups (notably at Stockbridge Village). Importantly, one of the main issues for the tenants was obtaining reliable information and disseminating it to their constituencies.

It is difficult at this stage to assess with any accuracy the level of mobilisation. The collective feeling of the Federation was that it was 'vast' but, of course, there were variations on different estates. Attendance at

public meetings were, not surprisingly, biggest when the issue of rents was being discussed and during the Stockbridge Village 'eviction' from Murdishaw. Indeed, on the Brow estate 200 tenants and residents turned up to a meeting to discuss this issue at a hall too small to cope with the numbers. The meeting was relayed to a waiting crowd outside. This surprised members of the Fed. because the Brow was not directly affected, The Village was seeking to manage only the Murdishaw estate, and indeed, the Brow was 60% owner-occupied.

The Runcorn study shows the importance of a history of association and/or organisation, however latent, as a resource for political organisation. It acknowledges Lowe's point concerning the instrumental attitude of working class people towards association, and shows the alliances that tenants' and residents' groups may make. The experiences of the Runcorn Fed. show the importance of associations articulating interests in the urban environment, and the need to analyse urban politics so that objective interests are not taken for granted. The actions which occur do so as a result of complex and contingent factors operating at both national and local level, they are influenced by urban ideologies which are spatially and temporally variable. In this case, the rhetoric of 'accountability', in the housing association sector, and in government, at a time when the New Town Development Corporations were facing questions over their future,

figured strongly in the campaign. The importance of this is that these promises and 'messages' were useful as levers.

Through the study of the developments in Runcorn we can find support for Malcolm Harrison's (1990) argument which suggested that formal rights of representation cannot be removed, and established property rights cannot be eroded, without creating some scope for opposition; the 'management of consumption' contains such tensions that these can be exploited by ordinary households. These tensions are not simply confined to the socialised sector but are found also in the owner-occupied, mortgaged sector. It is worth exploring some of these ideas but we may note that Harrison does not consider these property rights and relations outside the two-tenure dichotomy. The Runcorn example goes some way towards filling this gap.

Harrison notes the close relationship between central government and building societies which, in the mid 1980s, promoted legislation allowing for building society diversification (Building Societies Act 1986). This allows mutual societies to convert to commercial company status. The issue attracted considerable public attention during the Abbey National's steps towards flotation. Harrison (1990) drew attention to the interesting reaction from the grass roots to these developments. Many members believed that building societies were organisations owned by their

membership, to whom managements should be responsible. Members of Abbey National who preferred mutual status were well organised, but its managers were able to control information, meetings and prepare substantial financial incentives to draw members into voting in their favour. Opponents of flotation, therefore, had an up-hill struggle. Furthermore many ordinary members found it difficult to perceive differences between mutual status and life with the proposed new company.

Not surprisingly, Abbey National's management won the ballot. But resistance to the flotation came from the grass roots, holders of individual property rights who tried to act collectively against the holders of power (Harrison, 1990). Harrison argued that government encouragement of owner-occupation has connected with a model of building society practice which suggests that these are relatively benign organisations representing and assisting millions of ordinary householders and 'small investors'. A notion of mass level representation has become part and parcel of the conception of a 'property-owning democracy'; it has provided the legitimacy for privileged access by building society leaders to government as well as to shape public policy in their interests. The government cannot easily dismantle this set of relationships without risking some political consequences. Formal rights of representation for members cannot, therefore, be abandoned completely.

In council housing we can find similar tensions between the centre and the grass-roots, according to Harrison. The 1980 Housing Act right-to-buy legislation was a political success, which generated little effective collective opposition, since it enhanced the rights of tenants (although it had adverse consequences on those seeking housing or inhabiting residual estates) 'but it is a different matter to take away individual rights or to cut across established claims and expectations. The shift in national housing policy since the mid 1980s has done this, and there has been a strong reaction from tenants' (Harrison, 1990: 124). Harrison noted that government presented 'opt-out' legislation in terms of the opportunities it offered tenants. But these policies do not enhance tenants' rights. Rather the legislation looked as though it had been designed to 'carve out new territory for private investment by allowing various kinds of landlords to bid for local authority estates' (Harrison, 1990: 124-125).

Giving tenants the vote led to ballots demonstrating the support of council tenants for local authority provision. Tenants are keen to protect their security of tenure, rights of access to local politicians and managers, and the right to a say in the future of their homes. Harrison notes that 'these are individualised property rights but have been the basis for group action against right-wing local authorities and central government'

(Harrison, 1990: 125). Householder rights claims are less established for council tenants than for owner-occupiers, but involve similar principles. 'Tenants have claims and expectations that cannot be completely denied by governments. In using the rhetoric of "tenants' choice" the government has encouraged the idea of individual household choice and rights in this way, government has sought political advantage but has also set up potential obstacles' (Harrison, 1990: 125). The government could, however, lever tenants into opting to leave local authority tenure if rents are forced up in comparison to housing costs in other tenures.

We must, however, recognise that in some contexts local authority control may not represent a guarantee of tenants' property rights. Indeed tenants may seek to opt out of local authority control precisely in order to maintain their property rights. This has been the case in Westminster where tenants have fought a bitter battle against the right wing conservative authority to gain control of the Walterton and Elgin estates. The 1988 Housing Act provided the means to effect the transfer, which has taken place after six years of campaigning (Pollack, 1993). If the 1988 legislation was a cynical attempt to privatize council housing, then it is ironic that it is being used by tenants in Westminster to gain control of the properties in order that the units remain intact, in collective ownership (in the form of Walterton

and Elgin Community Housing: WECH) against the bitter opposition of Westminster council which 'had a strategy of selling off its properties and not filling vacancies' (Pollack, 1993: 21). Indeed it was the first tenants' group nationally to succeed in taking over property from a local authority. The important point is that the transfer will enhance tenants' property rights. Residents will have rent increases limited to no more than inflation for five years. The right to buy was retained and properties can now be sub-let, no one will be moved without their agreement and prospective occupiers are to be closely involved in the re-design of flats and houses. Self management, according to WECH, has its problems: the financial constraints are limiting, for example. WECH will receive £17.5 million over five years in recognition of the repairs needed, and £3.5m will come from the Housing Corporation but the group had originally sought more than £60m to renovate and re-occupy Chantry Point and Hermes Point (the asbestos riddled 21 storey blocks on Elgin). The shortfall will mean a reduction of stock, ironically, as demolition becomes the only option of these units. Indeed the WECH may need to sell off some of the houses to fund the rehabilitation of the estates (Pollack, 1993).

In summary, we could suggest that the concept of housing class is of limited value in theorising these struggles. Neither can these conflicts be reduced to class arising from the productive sphere. In the actions taken

by tenants we saw that groups often held very similar positions in relation to the 'means of housing' but, also that effective actions took place on an inter-tenure basis, particularly in Runcorn. There was little to be gained from seeing tenure as a social or political category.

Rex and Saunders, respectively, promote an understanding of where lines of affiliation may occur and where analysts may expect divisions, but these remain *empirical questions*. As Ball (1983) has pointed out, such theorising must not prevent the investigation of potential and actual alliances of housing consumers across traditional tenure lines.

The idea of housing class consciousness remains useful, but requires elaboration and detail. This chapter, using some ideas developed by Lowe (1986) from urban social movement theory as a starting point, has tried to provide an understanding of the processes involved. From this investigation we may agree with Bell (1977) that status may undermine collective consciousness but the struggles we have reviewed here are not simply status struggles; neither are they short term necessarily (Bell, 1977). Tenants' organisations may give the impression of being short-term when studied over a limited time span. However, as Lowe (1986) has shown, it is necessary to study tenants' and residents' organisations over a period of months or longer in order to go beyond 'the impression that tenants

associations are a superficial and eclectic form of urban protest' (Lowe, 1986: 84). Lowe's study of the Sheffield tenants' movement, along with the examples discussed above demonstrates that 'where there is a deep-rooted social base, the life cycles of the movements are more complex and sustained' (Lowe, 1986: 84-5). Whether or not these groups direct resources away from those who could not or failed to mobilise (Bell, 1977) is also an empirical question.

The investigation of urban protest in the form of resident and tenant activity discussed here is premised on Ward's (1975) argument that conflict cannot be assumed from objectively defined common interests. Thus the mechanisms which promote recognition of common interests arising from tenure and locality, the factors which have contributed to the process of mobilisation, and the contingencies which may inhibit that consciousness, mobilisation and action have formed the focus of the chapter. The empirical work discussed in this chapter supports Barlow and Duncan's (1988) critique of housing class and consumption sector models. While tenure related influences are evident, it is very clear that political action arises from the material base of tenurial relations, the relations of occupancy and ownership. These are bound up and articulated through wider class and status relations - expressed in temporally and spatially specific ways. Following the work of Barlow and Duncan (1988) considerable support is found for their argument that suppliers of housing must be included in the

analysis. This was an important omission from Rex's work and inadequately conceptualised in Saunders', whose thesis was concerned with the idea of dominant classes conceptualised in terms of those who had material interests in supplying housing for profit.

In this chapter I have discussed the importance of material interests in tenants' and residents' actions. However, as suggested in this and Chapter Two, housing does not simply constitute a material concern. Rather, it is bound up with ideas of locality, community and use-value. The following chapter examines some of the struggles which have taken place in and around the Merseyside region over these issues.

Chapter Five

Multi-tenure community actions: struggles for locality and use-values

In the previous chapter I discussed how residents (owner-occupiers and tenants) organised over the material interests associated with the ownership and control of domestic property in Runcorn. Both tenure groups have been organised for many years at estate level and together formed the Runcorn New Town Residents' Federation in 1987. It was noted that owner-occupiers and tenants occupy the same estates and therefore live in the same neighbourhoods, indeed they can effectively claim to be part of the same 'community'. The facilities available on the estates are shared by both tenure groups and both hold some material interests in common (for example, with regard to the 'dowry' and its management). Both groups fear the break up of their communities and were concerned to maximise the use-values (as opposed to exchange values) of their neighbourhood. Both groups indicated a desire to foster the sense of community built up during the struggle, and both were concerned about crime, security, and the green environment. Combination offered the capacity to call those who managed their environment to account.

We may note that the social base and the nature of the interests involved were relatively straightforward in Runcorn and in relation to the High Rise Group. Nevertheless, it was not possible to see divisions between owners and tenants in any simple way. This chapter aims to

complicate the picture by examining multi-tenure action groups in different parts of Merseyside where the significance of tenure may be interrogated.

Ball (1983) has argued that analyses should not close off inquiry into potential forms of alliance amongst housing consumers. The housing class models, by emphasising divisions rather than potential alliances, have a tendency to do this. Organisations containing two or more tenure types were active and visible in Merseyside and its hinterland during the fieldwork period. This, together with the interesting nature of organisations containing what may be considered multiple objective housing interests, and their potential contribution to the understanding of community organising and the management of protest in the modern city, demands that attention is given to these phenomena. Indeed, an examination of multi-tenure community organisations will shed light upon the limitations of the housing class models and their critics, at both methodological and theoretical levels.

Housing class and theorising multi-tenure community action

For Saunders, housing classes were identified by objective criteria, the most important being the potential to accumulate wealth through the ownership of domestic property, especially through the tax benefits (MITR) associated with it. The increase in the number of home

owners, he argued, would lead to growing divisions between housing consumers. It is not unreasonable, then, to presume that joint actions taken between property owners and propertyless (tenants) could be dismissed as 'false class consciousness' under Saunders' schema. If we accept that such a proposition is a rather tenuous one, then we must find another way to understand these phenomena.

We saw in Chapter Two that not only did Saunders assume that conflict would occur over these objective interests but he also developed ideas concerning the strategies that housing classes would use to pursue their interests. Drawing on Parkin (1974) Saunders suggested that owner-occupiers may adopt strategies of exclusion or solidarity in relation to dominant or subordinate interests. The analysis allows for some alliances but these are not pursued through the analysis.

Gray's critique of Saunders' property class thesis⁵³ indicated avenues which may be explored when attempting to construct an analysis of multi-tenure community action. His point concerning the importance of home ownership as use-value, not simply as a financial asset, is of significance here. Indeed, for some owners in inner-city areas, there is little point pondering the exchange value of their property. Furthermore, as Gray suggested, there are considerable methodological difficulties involved in

⁵³ Noted in Chapter Two.

separating economic from non-economic motivations underpinning action.

Saunders' move away from the property class thesis towards the consumption sector divisions approach, in his later writings, shows an emphasis on the cultural significance of home-ownership, and a diminishing focus on economic investment values. But Saunders provides us with little help towards understanding housing consumers' mode of association. Franklin (1986) argued that Saunders' discussion is underpinned by the questionable assumption that traditional forms of association have broken down to be replaced by a privatised, residential culture. To this Saunders responded that home ownership may actually increase involvement in social and associational life. But this remains undeveloped in his analysis. The question of how owners may involve themselves, why they do so, and the conditions attached to their association/mobilisation are not investigated in Saunders' analysis.

Rex and Moore do not emphasise divisions between housing consumers in the same way as Saunders but, in similarity, they tended to inhibit an analysis of alliances between groups of people in different tenures. Their critics and followers have not focused upon these issues. For example, Payne and Payne rejected the concept of housing class (accepted the idea of class-in-itself), and concentrated their discussion on single tenure groups.

Indeed, they over-emphasised tenure in a way similar to that criticised by Barlow and Duncan (1988)⁵⁴. Payne and Payne (1977) argued that 'residents' associations are almost universally based on a single or dominant tenure type, their strength resides in a shared awareness of common identity and lifestyle' (Payne and Payne, 1977: 156). The problem here is that these are *empirical questions*. Research in Runcorn and field work with other groups in Canning (Liverpool) and Peel Road (Sefton) showed evidence of multi-tenure based groups. The Paynes' work has a tendency to endow tenure categories with the power to determine styles of life and common interests, a proposition which is at best questionable. As discussed in Chapter Two, these authors strongly argued that urban sociology and the study of housing must take account of the role of 'action groups' in particular localities, but they do not examine these in detail: how they mobilise and which factors inhibit mobilisation. There is no discussion of common interests across tenure and the impact of tenure on community action.

Lambert (1975), drawing upon Rex and Moore's thesis, tried to examine some of these issues in an attempt to explain why successful community action did not emerge in a redevelopment area, despite the efforts of a group of residents and the assistance of a community worker. His main argument asserts that diversity in objective housing

⁵⁴ See Chapter Two.

interests, and a variety of subjective definitions of the situation, prevented organisation around common interests. This provides an interesting starting point in the study of multi-tenure community actions because it allows the analyst to understand where fault lines may occur, although this needs to be investigated rather than assumed. Where these objective interests are submerged during community mobilisation we need to understand the issues over which mobilisation developed. Where recognition of common interests and mobilisation does not occur, what are the processes which prevent their recognition? Is it simply objective differences in housing class?

Lambert, Blackaby and Paris (1975) suggested from their research that managerial procedures (such as waiting lists) prevented the recognition of common interest amongst a fairly homogenous group of renters. These prevented the recognition of the political nature of housing by converting it into an administrative procedure. In the previous chapter we saw how a range of factors had an impact upon the mobilisation of tenants in Liverpool and residents in Runcorn. Thus we can argue that an equally complex range of factors will have an impact upon communities organising within a multi-tenured locality.

This chapter therefore aims to examine the characteristics of multi-tenure community actions found in Merseyside: to examine one such case in detail which will

illustrate the complexity of the issues involved; to examine the significance of tenure in community actions, and the importance of divisions, if any. The discussion of the situation in Runcorn, in the previous chapter, indicated that we could not simply view owners and tenants as divided by housing interests, a stronger case would require further evidence. If there are no tenure based divisions is this because objective interests were sufficiently obscured by a variety of subjective definitions of the situation, as in Lambert's (1975) study? Or were other interests of greater significance?

Peel Road, Bootle (Sefton); Canning (inner-Liverpool) and Runcorn: Multi-tenure community actions

The social and economic make up of Runcorn was outlined in the previous chapter. It was argued that certain characteristics were associated with the high level of mobilisation witnessed there. It may be noted here that (1) a history of multi-tenure organisation is also characteristic of Peel Road (Bootle), and Canning (Liverpool). In each of these areas, like Runcorn, residents have been organised for at least two decades although this has not necessarily meant the same continuous organisational form. (2) In each case the residents' association has been engaged in actions with the local authority to a greater or lesser degree, but other institutions have become more important, especially central government agencies operating at the local level. (3)

Organisations claiming to represent people in each of these localities believed community workers were invaluable for organising the community and have such workers operating in their locality, or were in the process of employing community workers. (4) The respective organisations held ideas of 'community', the local (green and built) environment and the quality of life to be important issues around which they would mobilise. (5) Organisations claiming to represent the interests of residents in these areas found that one of their main tasks was to obtain information from the institutions with whom they were engaged in action or conflict, and to disseminate it to their constituencies or to a wider group (as a lobbying tactic).

A note on the concept of community

A common theme running through the multi-tenure action group data was the aim to 'defend the community' (Peel Road), 'build the community up/back up' (Runcorn), to 'strengthen the community' and to 'benefit the community' (Canning Area Action Group)⁵⁵. The meaning of these intentions, in practice, was rarely defined or spelled out. To anyone familiar with the sociology of community literature this is not surprising. Bell and Newby for instance note that Hillery (1955) discovered ninety four definitions of community, and that the only common factor

⁵⁵ Field notes.

uniting them was the existence of people (Hillery, 1955 in Bell and Newby, 1971). Indeed, Bell and Newby (1971) note in their introduction to *Community Studies* that there has been great confusion amongst sociologists between empirical description (what it is) and normative prescription (what sociologists feel community *should* be). They note that empirical description is difficult without value judgements. Not least because almost everyone wants to live in a community, including social scientists. The idea of community, with its strong emotive overtones, has allowed writers from diverging perspectives to unite beneath the concept. The significance of this is seen in the way that it is not only sociologists who can unite under the idea of community but so can differing interests within a community, or perhaps more accurately, people in a locality who wish to be a community.

The desire for community exhibited by social scientists and activists is not surprising given the amount of scholarly and literary work promoting it over the past two centuries (Bell and Newby, 1971). Neither is it surprising that these writings emerged in a period of rapid social change, especially during the 19th Century. Ferdinand Tonnies' work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* remains significant in this respect. It is not difficult to see the desirability of *Gemeinschaft* relationships over the functional, rational, impersonal relationships associated with *Gesellschaft* in Tonnies' terms (in Bell and

Newby, 1971) in the late 20th century. Indeed, we still find social scientists engaging in normative prescription in the modern period.

In the late 20th century, as in the late 19th, we can see how community groups may regard the characteristics associated with the idea of community (in Tonnies' conception of *Gemeinschaft*) desirable. Here human relationships are intimate; status is ascriptive; roles are specific; people are immobile (geographically and socially); culture is homogenous and community sentiments involve close and enduring loyalties to place and people. Issues, events and explanations are personalised. For Tonnies, like other nineteenth century writers, community meant solidary relations. Bell and Newby suggested that these ideas of community are strongly intertwined with the territorial factor, place and locality (1971: 24). Ideas about kinship, neighbourhood, and friendship that are associated with community are to be revered against the backdrop of modern society which Tonnies called *Gesellschaft* and others may simply refer to as modern capitalist society. 'Society' is everything that *Gemeinschaft* is not; relationships are rational, impersonal and are grounded in contractual obligations (Bell and Newby, 1971).

Some of these themes can be observed in the work of late twentieth century urban social theorists, such as in

Castells' (1983) *The City and the Grass Roots*. In Castells' discussion of urban social movements a critique of the rational, impersonal, technologized, advanced capitalist city is developed. In response, urban social movements have one or more of the following three goals: (1) to promote a city based on use-value and against the logic of exchange value in the distribution of goods and services; (2) the goal of community based on a 'search for cultural identity' and the defense of that identity against 'one way information flows' (particularly on behalf of the media) and the 'standardisation of culture' (Castells, 1983: 319). The third goal is characterised by a quest for urban self management and autonomy from both local government and the centralised state. According to Castells, urban social movements are defined primarily by their goals. However, in defining their goals and in seeking to realise them, they invariably meet with opposition. Castells' urban social movements are specific to the historical context in which they arise, they are a 'symptom of resistance' to social categorisation and domination and as such are defensive organisations, reactive rather than proactive. They relate to consumption, communication and power relations rather than to the relations of production (Castells, 1983). At least some of these processes are to be found in contemporary community and tenants' groups, as Lowe (1986) has also observed. But as Lowe (1986) noted, many of these

concepts, like that of community, remain undefined and vague in Castells' work.

The Peel Road, Canning and Runcorn groups are each characterised in this study by their multi-tenure base, but they have a number of important differences. It was noted in the previous chapter that most residents observed in Runcorn were working class. Despite attempts to create 'balanced communities', residents settling in the New Town were mainly semi-skilled and skilled workers while later settlers were people increasingly marginal to the workplace and those who had retired. People in Runcorn were described as ethnically homogenous and organised religiously along the Catholic and Protestant divide, if holding allegiance to organised religion at all. There are few visible sectarian tensions nowadays in Merseyside. Peel Road Community and Residents' Association, on the other hand, represents what many would regard as a traditional working class community. This association represents people inhabiting property owned by its occupiers, but it also represents housing association tenants, private renters and council tenants, although the observer would find it difficult to make these distinctions. People involved in the community and residents' association are overwhelmingly working class and white. It is a stable community; many people have lived here all their lives. The chair of the residents' association had lived in Peel Road for 57 years at the time

of the interview in March, 1992. Many male residents had been employed on the docks, which stand on the opposite side of the road (the A565) from the Peel Road community, and in port related industries. Few are employed there now. Jimmy, the Chair, is unemployed. Canning's residents, on the other hand, are from a mix of social and ethnic backgrounds. Canning is a special case which I explore as a case study in the following section. First I examine some of the issues over which residents in Peel Road organised.

Peel Road Residents' and Community Association

Few people in the Peel Road Residents' and Community Association remember precisely why the organisation was established. Remembering such detail is not so important to the residents. The issues facing the community now, are. It seems it was constituted around the time of local government re-organisation in 1974⁵⁶ when Bootle became part of Sefton Borough Council, although most residents in the Peel Road area still consider themselves Liverpudlian. Activists say that the Peel Road Community and Residents' Association was set up in order to 'benefit and defend their community' and that it has tried to do this throughout its history, which has seen cycles of activity and periods when the association has been more dormant.

⁵⁶ Following the Local Government Act of 1972.

Peel Road's day-to-day business is organised by its chair and a small committee. Officers are elected democratically from the wider community at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), and meetings are held periodically, although not necessarily regularly, between the committee and the wider Peel Road community. This means that the organisation has a tendency to be oligarchic. The committee often needs to take executive decisions because of the need to respond to situations quickly. Nevertheless the committee can, and does, call upon the community to demonstrate its support for those decisions, whether this means attending a public meeting, a Public Inquiry or demonstrating in support of associational interests.

During the fieldwork period the Peel Road association was involved in a Public Inquiry⁵⁷ into coal dust pollution in their area. It was argued that the pollution resulted from ships transporting coal to Liverpool and then through Bootle by road in uncovered lorries. Tenants and residents researched the problem and recorded levels of pollution by monitoring coal dust in their homes (on a daily basis) and the movement of coal on the docks. Equipment for photographing the evidence (giving dates and time on the photograph), for legal purposes, was purchased. This evidence was presented to the Inquiry and residents made representations in the legal battle which emerged. The Chair of the association expected the legal battle to be

⁵⁷ The Public Inquiry began on the 19th of November, 1991.

long and drawn out but said that the community association would not be deterred by this.

It is not difficult to understand why the tenants were so determined to win their action. Peel Road residents, in an interview on the 10th of March 1992, spoke of the 'horrifically high levels of asthma among local school children' and the poor quality of life endured by the residents. Many homes in the area are covered in a film of coal dust, washing cannot be hung out to dry, and in some dwellings coal dust has covered furnishings. Residents in Peel Road identify a number of organisations they say are responsible: Powergen, Mersey Dock and Harbour Company and MGB Coals because 'they are only interested in profits'⁵⁸.

Peel Road has been involved in a number of other actions over environmental and health issues. The community association has, as a result, developed skills and strategies which can be used as a resource in future struggles. In June 1990 for example the community organisation was successful in turning ships carrying toxic PCBs away from the port. The event, recorded by the national and local media (including radio and television), was supported by South Wales' community groups (the ships were to dock in Bootle and then take the waste to South Wales for disposal). Community groups from the Welsh port which had been campaigning against receiving the waste,

⁵⁸ Interview 10th March 1992.

came to Bootle to engage in the Peel Road action alongside them. A dialogue continued between the community groups for a while after. The Peel Road community also came into conflict with the local authority (Sefton Borough) over its waste disposal record and the problems of rubbish in the back alleys.

Through their experience of private companies on the docks, the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company, and the council, the community has developed its own ideas about where power lies in their locality. The committee see little prospect of the situation changing. They regard some of the dock companies as having 'the power to pollute'⁵⁹, while they have little power to force them to alter behaviour offensive to their community, to provide information or consult with the Peel Road community. The Council was not seen by members of the committee as being a major power holder in the locality. Some private interests consult the community association on a voluntary basis (Powergen now consults the chair of Peel Road, on such a basis for example) but this is not formally constituted or enforceable. It depends upon the personalities involved and has been considered a public relations exercise. But this does not mean that the community accept these state of affairs quietly. The following, and my final example of Peel Road's concerns,

⁵⁹ Interview 10th March, 1992.

will illustrate the activists' reasons for continuing their protests over the quality of life in their area.

The incident began, for the Peel Road community, with 'hundreds and thousands of dead birds falling from the sky over Bootle' and the community association trying to find out what was happening. The community association contacted a number of agencies including Sefton Borough Council and, more specifically, the Environmental Protection Officer for the Borough, to find out what was going on. These appeared to know nothing about the incident. Eventually the community association managed to establish that Rentokill had been licensed to carry out culls by the Ministry of Fisheries and Food and that they had been asked, by one of the grain importing companies on the dock, to cull the birds. Poison had been laid for the birds and had taken effect when the birds were in flight. They had fallen from the sky in their hundreds over Bootle. Five thousand birds had been culled. They remained on some streets for weeks. Not surprisingly community members were concerned about health issues and were angry about the lack of consultation between those responsible and themselves or the local authority. This example is competent to show where the Peel Road residents feel power resides in their locality⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Noted during interview with the Chair of Peel Road Residents' and Community Association.

Peel Road Community and Residents' Association has developed into an experienced lobbying organisation, but activists recognise the restrictions upon their power. Committee members have acquired skills in using the media⁶¹, in the business of organising and strategies for challenging powerful institutions. The association used a variety of tactics to further its interests, from legal challenge to direct action. Financially, the community association is supported by donations, sometimes from the media, and a small grant from Merseyside Improved Houses⁶². But Peel Road is striving to retain its independence from any major institution. It may be noted here that this association benefits from support from the community development worker in the area (who is employed partly by MIH and partly by Sefton Borough Council through funds obtained through the Urban Programme).

As in the Runcorn study, no fragmentation between the various types of housing consumer along the lines to be expected according to the housing class theses was evident in the Peel Road case. Were there objective interests which failed to be recognised? How important are these interests if they hold little relevance in the subjective

⁶¹ Peel Road featured on the 'Them and Us' programme on Channel Four over the coal dust affair.

⁶² Some of MIH tenants are organised into the community association and MIH has a policy of providing some funding to tenants' association who fulfil their criteria. This is discussed further in Chapter Six.

definitions of the actors? What are the processes which prevent the recognition of these objective interests?

The evidence from Peel Road supports Gray's critique of Saunders that home ownership is not simply a financial asset and that it is important for its use value. Home owners in Peel Road *may* have become involved in the Peel Road actions in the hope of safeguarding their property values. But as Gray indicated, it is difficult to separate economic from non-economic motivations underpinning action. When residents were asked about their reasons for becoming involved in the association their responses were similar to that of the Chair who said that he became involved 'to improve the local community, and work for the good of the community and local environment in this part of Bootle'⁶³. Home owners and tenants alike expressed what may be termed a 'public service attitude'. This is not surprising as the issues facing Peel Road residents, around which they organised, affected the whole community, irrespective of tenure: pollution and its impact upon the health of the local people in particular, and the quality of the local environment in general. Residents of Peel Road exhibited interest in their neighbourhood and its use-value and opposed the interests of private capital in using it to accumulate profits.

⁶³ Interview 10th March, 1992.

Following the discussion of tenants' group mobilisation in Chapter Four, we may note that Peel Road residents felt that their interests were not represented by Sefton Council (which was regarded as being more interested in Southport), or the council was seen as incompetent to the task of representing their interests (for the local authority seemed to know as much, or less, than the community association about the activities of the grain companies requesting the culling of the birds, for example). An instrumental attitude towards organising as discussed by Lowe (1986), is reflected in the case of the Peel Road residents. But they are able to draw upon what is described as a relatively homogeneous, 'very close-knit community' when mobilising over these issues. In this context tenure is largely irrelevant.

Canning and the Canning Area Action Group: a case study in urban conflict and conflict management

In Canning, as in the other areas discussed above, residents have been organised at least since the 1970s, although not under the umbrella of the Canning Area Action Group (CAAG). CAAG has been engaged in the business of organising in relation to issues concerning the local authority, but other central government agencies organised at the city level have grown in importance. As in the other localities I have discussed in this chapter, community workers were seen as invaluable when organising the community, and one of CAAG's first tasks was to employ

such workers. The aim of 'building a sense of community' and 'fostering a sense of community' was prominent from the early days of CAAG. Together with the local (built and green) environment and the quality of life in Canning these were thought to be the most important concerns. As with the other groups I have discussed one of the main tasks of the association was to obtain information from the institutions with whom they were engaged in action or conflict and to disseminate it to their constituencies or to a wider group.

The goal of community (consisting of the kind of characteristics described by Tonnies and Castells, above) was indicated in the case of the Canning Area Action Group. As we have already noted, the idea of community finds little opposition. Uniting over a loosely defined idea, which is saturated with positive connotations, is easy. As Rex and Moore (1967) observed, the Sparkbrook Association managed to unite different interests under the slogan 'Towards a fuller and happier life' (Rex and Moore, 1967: 216). But the Sparkbrook Association was unable to take action, or its action was ineffective, when policies needed to be defined or responded to in a precise manner, as when housing policy was discussed. Agreement could not be reached between the different interests (Rex and Moore, 1967: 225). These authors talked about the 'myth of community' (Rex and Moore, 1967: 212) and noted that older people, in particular, the host community, identified with

this myth, although others became involved in the Sparkbrook Association in order to defend it. Other groups had different ideas about what Sparkbrook should be like, and there were still more opinions regarding the nature of the action to be taken to achieve these aims. But as Rex and Moore argued, the myth of community is a social fact, one which people live by (Rex and Moore, 1967: 212). Therefore, we need not be hindered trying to define the phenomena, rather we may concern ourselves with the way community groups use the concept of community, and with the way these struggles for community are played out in the political sphere. These issues are seen clearly in the following section concerning the Canning community.

The Canning Area of Liverpool lies to the east of the city centre in the Ward of Abercromby. Its boundaries are recognised as being Hope Street/Pilgrim Street to the West, Myrtle Street to the North, Grove Street to the East, and Upper Parliament Street to the South. Lying at these boundaries are the city centre shopping area and the Philharmonic Hall to the West, together with some of the John Moores' University buildings. Liverpool University lies on its Northern border and a new obstetrics and gynaecology hospital is under construction (at the time of writing) on the Eastern side. This will replace the Women's Hospital which is within the Canning boundaries. To the South, on the opposite side of Upper Parliament Street, lies Princes Park and Granby. Canning is a

relatively small area but one of great diversity. It is an ideal setting in which to set a discussion of the way people in a defined locality, have organised in order to build a sense of community and in order to promote the area's use-value against the threat of agencies benefitting from its exchange value. This examination of developments in Canning (from October 1991 to June 1993) will demonstrate a number of themes developed earlier in this and the previous chapter. It will indicate something of the different interests residing there, and how these are played out in the community organisation. The priorities and concerns of tenants and residents in Canning will be explored together with the extent to which action is taken and is successful in relation to these issues. Although the concerns of the community went wider than housing, special attention was given to the issue of housing throughout the research. It was envisaged that this would indicate the extent to which tenants and others occupying a different relationship to housing held different housing interests and the degree to which they manifested themselves in the policies and actions of the community association.

The study of Canning, and multi-tenure action groups more generally, restores the potential to recognise the alliances housing consumers make (Ball, 1983) and facilitates an evaluation of Rex's claim that we may look for the partial development of housing classes in the norms

and sentiments of associations in the city (Rex, 1971)⁶⁴. But, Rex said little about the mobilisation of multi-tenure action groups. Rex and Moore's study of the Sparkbrook Association, though, remains an important and interesting study and one which will allow comparisons to be drawn with the community association in Canning. Multi-tenure action groups are likely to become more prominent as the change in the balance of tenure continues.

Lowe (1986) has usefully drawn together literature which may aid our understanding of the mobilisation of residents and tenants. It will be recalled from Chapter Four that 'the social bases on which collective action most frequently developed in the urban system are (a) residential communities, and (b) sectoral consumption cleavages' (Lowe, 1986: 62). In Chapter Two we discussed critiques of the idea that consumption sectors are social bases. Here we may note that the idea of 'residential communities' as social bases is also fraught with problems. Lowe noted that the distinction between (a) and (b) is difficult but he argued that 'residential communities are defined by a mix of socially determined boundaries and the "districting" of external agencies' (Lowe, 1986: 62). His writing implied that community has a strong geographical component but the idea remains vague. More work exploring the nature of those boundaries and the mechanisms of

⁶⁴ See Chapter Two.

districting which brings communities into being is needed.

Lowe (1986) draws on the community studies literature of the 1960s to show the barriers to solidarity at the local level; parochialism, existing associational activity within an area and its potential to be harnessed, and status divisions are seen to be important in this context. Indeed, Lowe argued that ...'a precise knowledge of the social histories and social structures of individual areas is a prerequisite to understanding how and under what circumstances the mobilisation process operates' (Lowe, 1986: 66).

The study of community action in Canning was of further interest because between October 1991 and June 1993 the author was able to observe the foundation of a community group and the processes which accompanied its formation. As Stuart Lowe (1986) has pointed out

Most studies of local politics and pressure groups start at the point where an organisation already exists and assume a relationship between groups and their constituencies and members. This approach misses some vital lessons about the genesis of movements, the institutional definitions of issues in the urban environment and the routes by which social and economic stakes are embraced and metamorphosed by the formal and administrative/political system (Lowe, 1986: 61).

To take Lowe's first point concerning the social history of an area, we can note that in 1955-6 a group of social scientists studied a selected area of central

Liverpool, which they termed the 'Crown Street' area, east of the city centre (Vereker and Mays et al, 1961). Vereker and Mays were interested in the social structure, family life, economic and living conditions there. On finding wide variations within their survey district the researchers decided to break down the area into sub-areas. The first of which was in the Abercromby Ward and comprised the oldest section of their survey location. The boundaries they used to define this area were as follows: Upper Parliament Street to the South; Grove Street to the East; Myrtle Street to the North, and Gambier Terrace and Hope Street to the West. These boundaries coincide with those of the Canning Area Action Group, and with what is currently known as Canning by the planners and its residents. Interestingly, Vereker and Mays described this area in the following way.

The oldest part of the district lies in Abercromby Ward in the south west and comprises the first of the sub-areas. Situated on the brow of the fairly steep hill which leads down to the business centre of the city and the docks, it commands a view over the Mersey estuary to the Wirral peninsular and the distant Welsh hills. Towards the end of the eighteenth century a number of residences were built on the hill itself and in the first quarter of the nineteenth century the plateau at the top of the hill was steadily developed with Regency residences for the city's merchants. In addition to large houses lining the wide roads and a number of smaller streets with well constructed terraced houses, rows of mews cottages were built in the lanes behind, some over stables which housed the horses and carriages of the gentry. Today most of these mews are used as garages, while a few have become trading and workshop premises for small industrial concerns. The focal point of this sub-area is Falkner Square, probably the most nobly conceived of all the building in the district. It is a large square containing

gardens which until recently were the exclusive possession of the residents of the graceful mansions which surround them. But these former town houses of the successful nineteenth-century merchant gentlemen are under-going rapid decay; increasingly they are being sub-divided and sub-let; and the facade of grandeur is giving way to peeling paint, broken windows and a general air of neglect. The aura of respectability which the area surrounding this square once enjoyed has disappeared and in contrast with the servants and carriages and graceful living which persisted even until the beginning of the nineteen-twenties, it is today part of a typical zone of transition where immigrants and less rooted people tend to congregate. Although largely residential this sub-area includes a number of important public buildings, particularly hospitals and schools, several churches and the Philharmonic Hall (Vereker and Mays et al, 1961: 12).

For the most part little has changed. The schools have closed, the University now has buildings on the fringe of the Canning Area on Myrtle Street, and John Moores' University (formerly Liverpool Polytechnic) has a number of sites in the area, and is expanding. A new hospital is currently being built, and the Women's hospital is about to close, while the Children's hospital closed recently. But to a large extent the built environment remains the same. Some improvements have been made over recent years as buildings on the northern side of the Falkner Square have been rehabilitated as sheltered housing for Liverpool's ethnic minority elderly. Indeed the Square itself has recently been brought back into public use through the efforts of the residents of Canning, after years of neglect and abandonment. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the people of Canning there is an uphill battle against decay.

Vereker and Mays et al (1961) observed a most varied population in what we may call Canning in the present context. Their survey discovered 'young married couples, a number of professional people, and immigrant groups' (Vereker and Mays et al 1961: 29). The type of housing facilities available, the central location of the area in relation to the city centre, the proximity of the university and the other public buildings are seen as reasons why the area was settled by a number of social groups. They observed that most dwellings have been subdivided into flats and rooms and that there is a fast turnover of residents in the locality. Vereker and Mays found that family size was smaller in Canning than in the remainder of their sample. Other demographic features observed by these authors included the high proportion of un-married or young married heads of household and a high proportion of adults, though not of old people. Vereker and Mays et al found a high proportion of non-manual occupations in Canning - eleven per cent of heads of household could be found in the 'administrative, professional and managerial classes'. They noted that this was the only sub-area in their survey where shop-keepers and small employers did not form the large majority of those in the higher non-manual grades. These observations could have been made today. But one of the most startling changes since Vereker and Mays' study is the decline in the number of people in employment. The 1991 Census, for

example, showed that only 58% of males over 16 years and 51.65% of women are economically active in Canning.

Vereker and Mays et al noted that most dwellings had been sub-divided and the fast turnover of residents in the locality. They noted that changes in the population of Canning, in part, resulted from families settling there having moved from the dock area after their homes had suffered war damage. These settlers were accompanied by other groups from the West Indies and Africa. The latter groups often joined families who had settled for one or two generations in the locality, especially around Abercromby. Indeed it was very difficult for black people to move out of the inner-areas. A respondent in my study, Mr. J., a black man in his mid 70s, informed me that he was born in Abercromby Square and lived there until the Second World War. After demobilisation he tried to get rehoused by the council but faced considerable racist hostility from his new neighbours in Netherley, a predominantly white district. He returned to his family in Abercromby Square and was subsequently rehoused by the Abercromby Housing Association and latter became a tenant of Merseyside Improved Houses, who took over the management of the properties of the Abercromby Association in the 1970s. Mr. J. indicated that his experience was not uncommon at the end of the Second World War.

Vereker and Mays' study contains value laden terminology which tends to associate the social and economic decline of the area with the incoming groups of migrants (from within Liverpool and overseas). We can see from their study, however, that Canning had been undergoing changes in residential property use for at least thirty years before their study. The merchant and commercial classes began to leave, they argued, around the end of the First World War. Sub-division of property around Falkner Square was well under-way by the 1920s, a quarter of tenancies had been sub-divided by 1925. Chinese seamen based in Liverpool and families fleeing war damage were housed in the empty properties during the Second World War. The trend to sub-divide property and let rooms in houses in multiple occupation became commonplace after 1945, according to Vereker and Mays. These authors note that rents for Canning properties were 'inordinately high' (1961: 83), and that tenants had little security. People occupying these tenancies had very little housing choice. Their survey showed that 37% of respondents lived outside the area ten years before their study (1945). Incomers came from other parts of Liverpool, elsewhere in the United Kingdom and overseas, especially Ireland and the British Colonies in almost equal proportions (1961: 85). In the contemporary context we can note that data from the 1991 Census shows that 26.9% of the population in Canning had a different address one year before the census (1990).

Vereker and Mays note the general impression given by their respondents was that the area was in decline and that decline accelerated between the wars. As the merchant and commercial classes left Canning for mansions around the Princes and Sefton Parks the 'respectable working classes' saw social degeneration and social disorganisation where 'middle class splendour' had once been (1961: 79).

Around 1957 the University of Liverpool began to move residents from property around the Abercromby Square area. The University's development plan coincided with development plans for the nearby hospitals, and the city council. These bodies wanted to 'carry out this movement of population humanely and in a coordinated fashion' (Cook, n.d.:3). The University promised to 'take all possible steps to provide re-housing for persons..... displaced'. Cook notes that the Abercromby Housing Association was set up to carry out this task in 1949, although there was little activity in the first eight years. The University of Liverpool Archive notes that the properties contained a large number of 'lodgers and sub-tenants'. The housing association bought houses to be modernised and used to re-house those displaced by the University's expansion. The 1961 Annual Report of the Abercromby Housing Association reported that residents were being rehoused at a rate of one every four and a half days (Cook, n.d.:4). Cook notes that the management of the association was delegated to Liverpool Improved Houses (now Merseyside Improved Houses)

who eventually took over the ownership of the properties. The author of the archive material notes that the Abercromby Housing Association 'represents an essential strand in the complex history of the University's development. Many hundreds of Liverpool People have cause to remember it with gratitude' (Cook, n.d.:5). The evidence from Vereker and Mays et al (1961) study is somewhat different. These authors, in contrast, report that one of their respondents to the 1955 survey refused to have anything to do with the researchers when the respondent discovered that they were from the University. He described the University as 'that bloody octopus'. Moreover, these authors comment that this respondent 'expressed succinctly enough the affection and attachment of his fellow citizens to the part of the city in which they lived and the determination of most of them, despite the conditions, not lightly to be dislodged' (Vereker and Mays et al, 1961: 60). There remains an antipathy towards the university in the areas near to the university. Its activities in displacing the population may go some way towards explaining this and the reluctance of some local people to co-operate with researchers.

Vereker and Mays also noted conflict between different groups in Canning. In Abercromby Ward complaints of 'immorality, prostitution, street solicitation and the keeping of illegal houses and clubs' (1961: 79) were recorded. Hostility along the sectarian divide was still

in evidence at the time of their survey, despite periods of group organisation and 'friendliness' in some streets. They witnessed evidence of hostility on racial, religious and cultural grounds but, other than referring to the 'respectable families' dissatisfaction with the environment, these authors offer little explanation for this behaviour. Vereker and Mays, however, note that many people are content with their lives in this, and other parts, of Liverpool.

In a number of ways, as I have implied, Canning today has many similarities to Canning at the time of Vereker and Mays' study in 1955. It may also be remembered that it has many similarities to the Sparkbrook described by Rex and Moore in 1967. But there are differences between the Canning of 1955 and that observed in the early 1990s. Many of the professional and 'arty types' living in Canning, especially those associated with the University, the art studios and gallery (connected with the Bluecoat which was located in Sandon Street in the 1960s), moved out in the 1960s, and empty, derelict properties became more prominent. These properties were taken over by the local authority, later passed to the housing associations which began to expand at that time, and converted into flats, especially one-bedroom flats. This reinforced the area as one of transience because families were not enabled by the

nature of property available to reside long in Canning if they wanted to have children⁶⁵.

In February 1992 4094 people were recorded as living in Canning, divided into 2198 households. Approximately ten per cent of inhabitants are at or beyond retirement age and only 9% are children, aged 0-4 years. The majority of the population are between twenty-five years and retirement age, accounting for 48.92% of residents. Young people between the ages of 17 and 24 years account for 14.48% of the total population, and 17.56% of residents in Canning are aged between five years and sixteen⁶⁶. Here we may note some of the similarities with Vereker and Mays' study which, it will be recalled, observed a high number of adults but not of old people.

One of the major changes which has taken place, as I have indicated, concerns the change in the ownership of domestic property in Canning. The tenure base is very

⁶⁵ Margaret Simey speech to CAAG's second AGM held on the 26th May 1993. Margaret had resided in Canning since returning from Trinidad in the 1940s. She had spent a great deal of time visiting Canning even before then as she studied at the University in the Department of Social Science and visited friends in the area as a school-girl. Her friends were often the children of academics and 'arty types' who settled in Canning, as I have indicated above. Margaret Simey's biography includes service on both Liverpool City Council and Merseyside County Council before its abolition, the Chair of Merseyside Police Authority and was instrumental in the formation of the Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT).

⁶⁶ Figures from the Corporate Policy and Information Unit (Liverpool City Council) 20th February, 1992.

diverse in the present context; the properties, long divided into flats or multiple occupation, are owned as follows: 55% are owned by housing associations; 22% are owned by private landlords, 12% by the City Council and a further 11% are owner-occupied⁶⁷. For the purposes of contrast, it is worth comparing these figures with the national picture. In 1989 a mere 3% of properties were found in the housing association sector; 23% of properties were owned by local councils; 7% were owned by private landlords and the majority, sixty-seven per cent, were owned by their occupiers (with or without a mortgage).

Housing, or rather its rehabilitation, is identified by the residents of Canning as being a major priority⁶⁸. The dimension of the housing problem are many. The nature of the property itself created problems for the local environment because those sub-dividing properties did not take account of the facilities needed for waste disposal in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Waste disposal has become an issue over which residents have taken action with the council and the housing associations over recent months, pilot schemes to deal with the problem have been introduced (1992) as a result. Other housing problems include the fifty to sixty or so, council owned, derelict properties scattered around Canning which has an 'adverse

⁶⁷ Figures from the Liverpool City council, Department of Planning *Draft Strategy for Canning* October, 1992.

⁶⁸ Public Meeting 13th January, 1992.

impact upon the areas image'⁶⁹. To an unknown extent, poor quality rented and owner-occupied housing blights the neighbourhood. The social landlords are also finding it difficult to improve their properties in Canning; the funding arrangements, following the 1988 Housing Act, are having an impact upon the way that housing associations manage their property. Reductions in grant (Revenue Deficit) have increasingly meant that management and maintenance costs must be met from rental income (which will inevitably mean greater increases in rents). The property in Canning is costly to maintain because of its age and structure. Some housing associations, particularly those which modernised and converted property in the 1960s, which is now requiring refurbishment, are experiencing particular difficulties. The older properties constitute a considerable drain on resources for maintenance and repair. In addition, a high turnover means that there are management costs which would be considerably less in more stable areas.

Many residents and tenants in Canning, especially those who have lived there for a number of years, want to 'rebuild' a 'sense of community'. They talk of policies which will develop the community and action to 'defend the community'. Many such activists see housing problems as barriers to these aims. In particular, the low number of

⁶⁹ Liverpool City Council's *Draft Strategy for Canning* October (1992: 9).

families with children in the area is seen to militate against a stable population, regarded as being important for community development. The property's unsuitability for families means that if households wished to stay in the area and have families they would face considerable difficulty finding accommodation to meet their space requirements. Families with children would also require other facilities such as nurseries and creches, local shops, schools and play areas for example which are also absent from the area at present.

The area remains multi-racial. Many 'people of colour' are Liverpool-born, although some are recent refugees from Somalia or older people who migrated many years ago, a number of whom live in sheltered schemes in the locality. Figures from the 1991 Census shows that 67% of the Canning population would describe themselves as 'white' whilst 14% describe themselves as 'black', 3.2% described their ethnic origin as 'Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi', and 15.45% are described as 'Chinese and other groups'. 3.27% of people were born in Ireland, most of these are adults aged between 30 and retirement age. It has often been argued that it is rather more likely that black people will face hostility outside the main areas of black residence (which includes Granby, Canning and Smithdown) than within these boundaries. But unlike Vereker and Mays et al's study there is little evidence of

sectarian conflict in Abercromby Ward in the early 1990s.

Vereker and Mays noted that in Abercromby Ward there were complaints of 'immorality, prostitution, street solicitation and the keeping of illegal houses and clubs' (1961: 79). There are some parallels today. A Working Party on Prostitution was convened for the Abercromby Ward in the late 1980s, for example, and reconvened by the City Council in 1992 to address issues raised by prostitution for the area. But the situation is not straightforward. In the present context there is a tendency for 'sex workers' not to use brothels, although brothels are more common in other areas, for example parts of Birmingham⁷⁰. But it is also worth emphasising that many local people in Canning find the clients of prostitutes, kerb-crawlers, to be more problematic, although many more prostitutes are prosecuted than kerb-crawlers. In 1988 prostitutes were arrested on 540 occasions and 40 kerb-crawlers were cautioned, while the first eight months of 1989 saw 800 occasions where prostitutes were arrested, and 250 kerb-crawlers were reported, mainly because the evidence is easier to gather on the former rather than the latter group⁷¹. Residents know that all women in Canning are approached by kerb-crawlers, even school children as young as 10 and 12 years have been approached on the streets of

⁷⁰ Report of the Director of Development to the Planning Committee 29.9.88.

⁷¹ Minutes of the Abercromby Working Party on Prostitution 16th August, 1989.

Canning. On the other hand there is considerable sympathy for the women working on the streets, and support for decriminalisation in this respect. Many residents believe that many of the sex workers on Canning are often supporting a drug-habit⁷², or are supporting others (partners and pimps) with dependencies. Furthermore, many residents approve the idea of designated areas for the purpose of selling sex outside of a residential area such as Canning, where women could be supported by health agencies, for example. The residents know that a change in the law would be required to bring about such a policy and that support would therefore be required from the general public. It is felt that the wider public do not come into contact with prostitution and are unaware of the issues involved. Residents express the belief that current policies simply move the problem around⁷³. Drug related issues are identified as a more pressing problem, especially the dealing of hard drugs⁷⁴.

There is widespread tolerance of a diversity of what might be considered by some to be 'deviant' lifestyles amongst the current residents of Canning. In a survey

⁷² This is supported by survey work carried out by the Regional Drugs/H.I.V. Monitoring Unit in Liverpool.

⁷³ Public Meeting 18th March, 1993.

⁷⁴ Public meeting held on 18th March 1993 organised by CAAG to discuss prostitution and drug related issues.

carried out in Canning by this author in Spring 1992⁷⁵, it was found that whilst 70% of the sample were aware of kerb-crawlers, 12.5% were aware of brothels, 35% were aware of street alcoholics, 77.5% were aware of prostitutes working in the area, 37.5% knew of illegal drug users and dealers in Canning, considerably fewer were bothered by them. When asked 'Are you troubled by any of the above?', 25% replied that they were troubled by kerb-crawlers, 5% were troubled by brothels, 7.5% by street alcoholics, only 10% were troubled by prostitutes and 15% by drug users and dealers. The relatively low impact of kerb-crawling may be accounted for by the high number of men (70%) in this sample. Even so, this is the group giving the greatest level of concern to the community.

Vereker and Mays described the way the population evaluated different status groups in Canning. In the present context there are few overt references to ideas of 'the respectable working class' or others. This probably

⁷⁵ The survey was carried out in Spring 1992 following a pilot study in October 1991 carried out by another researcher. It consisted of 100 postal questionnaires sent out to the oldest converted properties owned by Liverpool Housing Trust, those converted before the 1974 Housing Act. The survey was conducted for the Canning Area Residents' and Tenants' Association. In the sample 92.5% were flats, the remainder being bedsits or maisonettes. The questionnaires were sent to all the oldest properties owned by LHT but since this represents only 25% of the stock in Canning owned by the housing association it cannot be seen as representative. Similarly, since the response rate was 40% there were a number of limitations on the generalisations to be made. Nevertheless the survey did reveal some interesting results which could be confirmed by other data.

derives from the large number of people who are outside the labour market in Canning (and inner-Liverpool more generally). Figures from the 1991 Census show that only 58% of males over 16 years describe themselves as economically active, whilst the figure for their female counterparts is 51.65%. 16.74 per cent of people in Canning recorded themselves as unemployed in the 1991 Census⁷⁶, whilst a similar number (16.61%) described themselves as having a limiting long term illness.

I have placed emphasis on the importance of a history of organisation in a locality for the subsequent mobilisation of a community in this and other chapters. I have also noted problems associated with researching this question because of insufficient data. Vereker and Mays' study tells us little about the organisational structure of Canning in 1955. These authors do note the social activities of those in their survey area (which, it will be remembered, is considerably wider than the Canning area) and that these were confined to involvement in 'Co-operative Guilds, Mother's Unions, Young Wives' Groups, Working Men's Clubs and "political clubs" (not defined). Children and adolescents were involved in boys' or girls' clubs, Scouts, Guides, Brigades and Cadets' (Vereker and Mays et al 1961: 70), but their account contains little detail. Moreover these authors note that...

⁷⁶ Note that this is especially high given the age structure of Canning, that is, a low number of old people and children.

the most striking outcome of this part of the investigation was the paucity of contacts with social organisations revealed for all sections of the Crown Street community and in all age groups (Vereker and Mays et al 1961: 70).

However, it is also important to remember that there is an 'instrumental attitude towards association' in working class areas as Lowe discussed⁷⁷, and that informal contacts, especially among kin, were very much in evidence in the Vereker and Mays study. Importantly their study found a significant correlation between length of residence in an area and involvement in recreative and social organisations.

In the contemporary context there are a number of associations and organisations, ranging from tenants' and residents' groups to environmental, religious and conservation associations. Residents' groups have often been small scale operating in relation to a specific landlord, such as the Canning Area Residents' and Tenants' Association (CARTA) or small scale in the sense that they drew their constituency from a tightly defined area, such as Hope Place Residents, and Rodney Street Residents' Association. These groups were all in existence at the time of the formation of CAAG and had an impact upon its formation in January, 1992). In addition, several former members of the Canning Area Residents' Association (CARA) were founder members of CAAG in its early period. CARA was

⁷⁷ See Chapter Four.

a community wide residents' and tenants' group which was particularly active in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It went into decline as an active organisation around 1985, and eventually it ceased to be an active organisation⁷⁸. Although data on CARA is limited it is apparent that the organisation did have some notable successes. The policy of 'enveloping'⁷⁹ to improve property in Canning resulted from CARA action. Partly because enveloping benefits owner-occupiers and private landlords, CARA was seen as an owner-occupier dominated residents' group. But the evidence suggests that the situation was by no means so straightforward. Respondents who were involved said that the policy benefitted the local area and that any

⁷⁸ Interview (12.3.92) with former members of CARA who became involved in CAAG.

⁷⁹ Enveloping was developed as a middle way between municipalisation and improvement grants (at 90%) and leaving property in private ownership. Birmingham City Council is credited with pioneering the practice in the late 1970s. The problem with improvement grants was that improved properties were scattered about a locality and that it was administratively expensive. In addition, the valuation gap - between the cost of improvement and the value of the property - inhibited take up by private owners. 'Enveloping' was developed to overcome some of these problems. The local authority in Birmingham, in 1977, used money from the Government's construction programme to renew or repair roofs, chimneys, guttering, pointing, windows, and paintwork in an attempt to encourage owners to take up grants to rehabilitate interiors (Balchin, 1985). The benefits are economies of scale for builders and administration savings for local authorities when compared to the sole method of improvement grants. On the negative side there are problems of equitability. Owner-occupiers and landlords of private tenancies benefit, their properties increase in value whilst they already receive subsidies from the public purse. Also it may be wasteful for councils to envelope an area which then deteriorates because a number of the occupants felt unwilling or unable to make applications for improvement grants (Balchin, 1985).

improvement was better than none. Moreover they argued that the allegations that CARA was owner-occupier dominated came from the housing associations in the area, who could not benefit from the policy, although they have received other benefits from the City Council and the tax payer. Whilst such evidence lends support for an analysis of divisions of interest along the lines of property class, at this stage it is difficult to pull together information regarding the conflicts associated with CARA's campaigns.

It may have been the case that owner-occupiers did dominate CARA. There is some evidence to support the view that home ownership has a significant impact upon neighbourhood activism (Cox, 1982). Although Cox (1982) argues that this is due more to the greater costs of moving for owners (in the face of a neighbourhood problem) than renters, and the likelihood of spending a greater length of time in a neighbourhood than tenants, who tend to be more transient. The financial investment associated with home-ownership, as argued by Saunders, is not supported as a reason for home-owner involvement in Cox's study. In this sense we would expect the owner-occupiers to dominate CARA with little conflict with tenants, but the data is insufficient to establish that this was the case. There is a tendency for tenants to be transient in Canning as I have indicated above. But there is also a considerable group of residents who rent and who are long term residents of the locality. Renters and owner-occupiers are both evident in

the present community-wide residents' association, CAAG, and amongst its supporters. It is to the present situation that attention will now be directed.

The officers of the Planning Department of the City Council played an important role in laying the foundation for CAAG's formation at the end of 1991. To trace that history we may note that on the 18th of December 1991 the Department organised a public meeting at St. Brides Church, Catherine Street, Canning, to obtain a response from the community to the Government's City Challenge regeneration proposals - which required community consultation in order that Liverpool's bid could be made. We may understand the Planning Department's interest in consulting the community in terms of progressive professionalism, past mistakes and some statutory requirements. But members of the community at this meeting were, in a number of respects, dissatisfied with the consultation they received.

Activists in Canning often expressed the feeling that the area had been abandoned by the City Council. The area was designated *residential* in the 1958 City of Liverpool Development Plan and the council has rejected any challenges to this status since. In order to preserve, and capitalise upon, the special features of the area, notably the Georgian facades of buildings, it was declared a Conservation Area in 1970. But a number of community activists believe that the City Council, apart from drawing

up this general framework, has taken a back seat in relation to developments in Canning.

[The Planning Department of the City council] had lay dormant for fifteen years (cited at the meeting of the interim CAAG committee 27th January, 1992)

Furthermore, at a meeting of the interim committee on the 3rd of February, 1992 a number of members expressed the view that

housing policy, as pursued in the area, namely, the fact that it has been left to housing associations, had "failed the area" (Minutes).

In the first instance, then, CAAG was set up to provide a community response to the City Council's City Challenge bid. Earlier consultations were considered inadequate and the city's past record did not promote faith that their proposals would meet with the approval of the community.

In order that the community could articulate their views on the City Challenge proposal a public meeting was set up for the 13th of January, 1992. At this meeting, the acting chair indicated that the difference between this and the previous meeting was that the priorities and agendas were to be set by the community. It is worth noting that of those expressing a connection with a community based organisation, no less than eight residents' and/or tenants' associations had members representing them (including people who had previously been members of CARA). Indeed, the acting chair of the meeting indicated that there was a need for a coherent response from the community in view of

so many different organisations operating in Canning. It is also worth recording that from the onset the community representatives were looking for a coherent message from City Challenge and the council. There were many complaints about insufficient, piecemeal information concerning the City Challenge proposals⁸⁰.

Residents' and tenants' groups at this first meeting identified the following issues as priorities for the Canning community: educational provision, housing, jobs and training, roads (cleaning, lighting, traffic management, and the back alleys), architectural heritage, derelict buildings, the balance between residential and commercial use, a community centre, a community worker, and a coherent policy towards open space (not in order of importance) (Minutes). It was also suggested that these issues should be addressed irrespective of City Challenge. The council was regarded as responsible for at least some of the problems facing Canning residents, and residents felt that the council should be pressured to do something about them. It was evident during this meeting that a number of people appeared very well informed about City Challenge, but others knew very little. At least in part, CAAG was formed to facilitate information sharing across the community and its organisations.

⁸⁰ Minutes of the meeting held at St. Brides Church on 13th January 1992.

There was disagreement about the nature of the organisation to be established at this meeting. Should it be an umbrella organisation of community based groups, or a straightforward residents' association? The outcome was a steering group which was established to 'respond quickly to City Challenge.... then work to set up an association to represent all interests' (Minutes). The steering group was also to act in an information gathering role and to further the aim of securing *meaningful* consultation with City Challenge and other bodies (Minutes).

Stan Ashworth acted as the interim chair (Stan was also the chair of one of the tenants' groups operating in Canning) of the steering group and soon the group had secured a small grant (£250) from the John Moores Foundation, who also provided headed stationary. The first meeting of the steering committee was held at the L8 City Farm (Canning) on the 27th of January. About twenty local people, half of whom were women, attended. In comparison to other residents' and tenants' groups I have observed in Merseyside the steering group was, on average, much younger. It was reflective of the ethnic make up of the area (described above). The social class composition of the group did reflect that of the Canning area, although those in professional positions were certainly over-represented on the steering committee (accounting for approximately a third of the volunteers). This was to be a problem for a group aiming to be representative of the

community and a problem that would continue through CAAG's first year.

The first meeting discussed the issue of formally establishing the steering group. This was considered necessary in order to ensure that City Challenge, and other organisations, would take the group seriously. An experienced member of Liverpool Council for Voluntary Service was invited to advise on the process of constitutionalizing CAAG. He expressed the view that there were potential problems ahead because of the different interests in Canning, such as those between owner-occupants and housing association tenants, because owners have an interest in higher house prices and because of 'their capacity to form a power-bloc in the organisation' (Minutes). The feeling of the meeting was that such a view was un-warranted in the Canning context because there were 'such common interests at the broad level in the Canning area' (Minutes).

CAAG's constitution was agreed at a meeting of the steering committee on the 3rd of February 1992. At this meeting the following priorities were identified by the community: *employment and training, housing and environment*, although there was some debate about what should be at the top of the priority list. Activists discussed whether to follow priorities achievable through Challenge, in line with Challenge priorities, or to address

those concerns identified by the community, which were regarded as less achievable in the absence of Challenge support. In other words, should CAAG prioritize in the way that City Challenge did⁸¹? It was evident to the steering group that the City Challenge Executive Group had already decided that housing in Canning should be regenerated through the private sector⁸². The City Challenge Executive had expressed a view that

public sector input could not be seen as cost-effective. For this reason environmental works rather than housing refurbishment should be City Challenge funded in 1992/3. The Group agreed to exclude housing refurbishment in Canning from City Challenge 1992/3 programme (Minutes).

The steering group was angry that priorities were being set by Challenge before the community had been properly consulted and that environmental improvements were to be pursued before economic regeneration which was seen to be a more prominent concern in other City Challenge areas⁸³.

The 3rd of February meeting resulted in a compromise; two lists of priorities would be established. The first list would indicate issues which could be addressed through Challenge and the second would contain those which could be addressed through other bodies such as the City Council and English Heritage, for example. It was also agreed that

⁸¹ Minutes 3rd February, 1992.

⁸² Seen in the minutes of the Meeting of the City Challenge Executive Group 20th January, 1992.

⁸³ Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting 3rd February, 1992.

these priorities should be sanctioned by the community at a public meeting before any further action was taken. There was a concern to involve the wider community in the decision-making structures of the community organisation, and to avoid replicating the 'undemocratic' structures of City Challenge.

On the 27th of February a further public meeting was held where the constitution was adopted and where it was agreed that the steering committee should stay in office until a further general meeting. By March the committee had submitted to City Challenge an application for funding to appoint a community worker, and during the following month the bid had been agreed in principle.

Over the following months many on the CAAG executive committee, including myself⁸⁴, believed that CAAG was being recognised as a bona fide organisation by City Challenge, the City Council and other agencies. But this perception was subject to change periodically. Certainly CAAG held regular meetings with the Planning Department and, through the mechanisms which were being established, had an input into the kind of improvements which should be made in Canning. CAAG was invited by the Planners to decide how monies should be committed in 1992, but the nature of the projects were broadly defined by the Planning Department.

⁸⁴ By this time I had been seconded to the executive committee and undertook the tasks of minute secretary.

Projects to improve street lighting, waste disposal (in conjunction with LHT) and a proposal to carry out a traffic management survey were agreed. By November 1992 the community worker was in post (funded by City Challenge) and consultation was being undertaken with the community concerning the nature of environmental improvements to Falkner Square, which had been un-usable for some considerable time. CAAG also became involved in the City Challenge structures, on its sub-groups and CAAG representatives attended 'assemblies'. But concern was being expressed on the CAAG executive, not least from the community worker⁸⁵, that some of the aims and priorities outlined in the early public meetings, and incorporated into the *Strategy for Canning* document produced by the City Council were not being addressed.

A number of processes were at work which resulted in only a few of the outlined priorities being addressed in the first year. The initiatives receiving attention were relatively uncontroversial. Many people could see clear benefits to improving the lighting in the area, improving refuse collection and waste disposal⁸⁶. Traffic management

⁸⁵ Canning Community Worker's Progress Report February, 1993.

⁸⁶ Refuse storage was a particular problem in Canning. The sub-division of property had created more households per house, but landlords had not made sufficient provision to store household waste. This was not only unsightly, because it spilled over onto the streets and back alleys, but could also constitute a health hazard, particularly in the summer months or in relation to discarded needles.

was identified as a problem by members of the community although the issue seemed to be pushed along by certain members of the executive committee who had particular (environmental) interests close to their hearts. The benefits of improving Falkner Square, as a community resource, were easy to convey to the community. Few would disagree with aims to improve the quality of life in Canning. All interests represented on CAAG's executive could claim to be pursuing the groups' constitutional aim: 'the group is established to promote the benefit of the inhabitants of the area' (Clause 3) in relation to these tasks.

There were no observable differences of opinion between home-owners and renters on the executive committee of CAAG. Clearly environmental improvements could benefit home-owners to a greater extent than tenants since the former could envisage economic gain from rising house values⁸⁷. But no firm conclusions can be drawn. There are methodological problems involved when trying to separate the economic and environmental (or other) motivations for supporting a particular policy. And, indeed, tenants were equally keen on supporting these improvements to their living environment. There was no evidence of conflict.

⁸⁷ Assuming of course that the economy was regenerated to an extent that sufficient pressure was placed on the private housing market in Canning.

It is also important to note that City Challenge created little opposition to these plans. Indeed City Challenge officials supported some of them as environmental works which accorded with their objectives. The Falkner Square project was originally a Planning Department idea. It was to be a 'flagship' initiative with community involvement. But it is also important to note that an environmental lobby was very prominent on the CAAG executive. At the time of CAAG's formation a number of environmental groups⁸⁸ were operating in the Canning Area (Abercromby Residents' Environmental Association for example). Members of these groups became involved in CAAG's work from its onset.

It could be argued that if divisions were likely to occur along the lines of tenure, they would do so over housing policy. But this was not the case either. CAAG's position was in line with that of the Planning Department, put forward in the *Draft Strategy for Canning* (October, 1992). The Strategy proposed to improve the quality and range of housing stock in Canning, by up-grading sub-standard stock, bringing vacant properties back into use and improving maintenance and repair schemes. The relationship between the housing stock (its lack of suitability for families) and community

⁸⁸ Many people and a number of organisations were interested in the environment in Canning (the built and the green environment) some of this interest was due to its status as a conservation area.

stability/development was emphasised by both the CAAG and the planners. These aims were to be achieved by the co-ordination of existing housing agencies (including the City Council and the housing associations) and by targeting funding from appropriate bodies (the Housing Corporation and English Heritage for example). It was recognised by the Planners and the CAAG executive that public monies would be needed to regenerate the housing stock in Canning.

These aims were in sharp contrast to those of City Challenge's Executive Group who argued that the solutions to the housing problems in Canning were to be found in 'the market' and through the private sector. Indeed, this accounts for one of the reasons why CAAG found it so difficult to make progress on their stated priority of bringing pressure to bear to improve the housing stock in Canning.

A policy of private sector regeneration could have had benefits for owners and purchasers of property through making improvement grants available to them or even targeting these at private owners. It can be argued that public investment in the derelict properties is to the benefit of owners, because it would protect property values, and other groups to the extent that it removes blight in the area. But no conflict emerged between home owners and tenants.

I have argued in Chapters Two and Four the importance of including suppliers of housing in an analysis of residents' and tenants' group struggles⁸⁹. The role of the local authority as a supplier of housing is recognised in the case of Canning, but in view of its limited ownership role and because of the existence of other powerful agencies operating at the city level, the need to widen the concept is evident. It became clear that the struggle to put housing on the City Challenge agenda was having an impact upon CAAG's role as a liaison body between the community on one hand, and other agencies on the other, as well as on the ability of CAAG to pursue one of its important priorities. These agencies include bodies such as City Challenge's executive, the Merseyside Task Force, the housing associations and the City Council (and certain of its departments, in this case, housing, planning and engineering). For the purposes of this chapter we may call these agencies the 'dominant authorities'⁹⁰.

Housing Policy in Canning: a conflict between 'dominant authorities'

I have indicated above that CAAG did not, or could not, pursue certain priorities outlined in the early public meetings and reflected in the *Strategy for Canning* document

⁸⁹ Especially in relation to Duncan and Barlow's work.

⁹⁰ I will elaborate this concept later in the thesis. Suffice here to note that the concept owes a debt to Pahl's concept of urban managers.

produced by the Planning Department. I have also shown how the City Challenge Executive Group had fairly fixed ideas about housing policy in Canning, namely that it should be pursued through the private sector. The divisions which became evident between City Challenge and the City Council had an important impact on CAAG. A number of members of the community association began to see themselves as being involved in a buffer organisation and became increasingly aware of the limits of their power.

The City Council's Planning Department was, as we have seen, instrumental in initiating community involvement in the City Challenge initiative. Indeed, the Department was initially regarded by CAAG as being genuinely committed to involving them, as representatives of the community, in decision-making. The *Strategy for Canning* put forward by the Department was seen to fall short of what could be achieved but CAAG felt the document to be broadly in line with their concerns. CAAG believed they were being listened to. The opportunity to define policies and to commit funding was interpreted in these terms (Minutes 17.6.92). The Planners often talked of developing strategies for Canning in partnership with the community (Minutes 17.6.92). The CAAG committee regarded the consultation strategy as part of a departmental aim to make better decisions or because the Planners believed that residents should, as a matter of right, be included in decision-making. But as time passed CAAG viewed their

involvement in Planning consultation as a result of Planning need. CAAG could provide support for the Planners' 'vision'⁹¹, and, as CAAG was broadly in agreement with that vision it was a convenient alliance, especially as many of the proposals outlined in the Strategy required public funds and lobbying would be needed to secure those resources. Increasingly, over time, it was felt that consultation was on the Planner's terms much more than CAAG's. This was reflected in agenda setting and in the tight-timescales for CAAG to respond to proposals (sometimes there were only a few days in which to make a response to Planning Department proposals, CAAG Minutes 29th May, 1992). For example, at the meeting of the CAAG executive of the 17th of June 1992, which was attended by members of the City Council's Planning, Engineering and Environmental Services departments, and City Challenge representatives, CAAG was invited to put forward spending proposals for environmental improvements and highways in Canning, to be funded in that current spending year⁹². CAAG was also asked to consider proposals for the following four years of the City Challenge initiative. CAAG welcomed the input but found the timescales very restricting. The Planners said that they needed time to prepare a project to design stage and that a deadline of the 8th of August would be necessary to achieve the spend (Minutes).

⁹¹The term used by the Planners in the Draft Strategy for Canning October, 1992.

⁹² Up to £400,000 (Minutes 19th September, 1992).

The nature of CAAG's consultation relationship with the Planning Department resulted in problems for CAAG and its relationship with the community. Tight deadlines meant that consultation with the wider community was more limited than it might have been otherwise. These concerns were expressed at the following CAAG executive meeting on the 15th of July.

Specific proposals should not be formulated until the residents have been properly consulted. CAAG cannot simply be used as a 'filter' or an excuse for resident consultation (Secretary: minutes of the meeting of the 15th of July, 1992).

These problems were compounded for CAAG because there were often delays before projects were implemented. Six months later work had still not commenced on the environmental improvements (Falkner Square) or the street lighting⁹³. The traffic management survey was still not underway in November, 1993. This was frustrating for CAAG especially after rushed attempts to consult the wider community, who were led to expect results. CAAG was in danger of losing its credibility with the community.

Like the Planners, City Challenge also needed to consult with the community, or at least be seen to be consulting with the community⁹⁴. The chance to influence decision making was attractive to many attending public meetings organised by CAAG, but there was a level of

⁹³ Minutes of meeting of the 20th January 1993.

⁹⁴ This is discussed in the following chapter.

cynicism about the consultation process. CAAG's Chair indicated his discontent with the way City Challenge communicated with community groups like CAAG. He said that Challenge

always want to be informed about our activities and proposals. But the progress of our bid, and general information about decisions taken by the Executive Group and its other decision-making committees is very lacking. We are dependent upon informal communications. We do not have access, as a matter of course, to their minutes nor are we regularly informed about issues that may affect the Canning Area. Depending on the 'grapevine' is insufficient (*Interview 9th July, 1992*)⁹⁵.

I will discuss the relationships between CAAG and these 'dominant authorities' in Chapter Six where issues relating to community, resident and tenants' group participation in decision-making structures are elaborated. Here I would simply like to indicate the context in which the struggle over the housing policy to be pursued in Canning took place. The main players were City Challenge and the City Council but the perceived friction between

⁹⁵ It may also be noted that the Planning Department wanted the minutes of all CAAG meetings, a request which was denied in view of the strategy meetings which were already taking place regularly between CAAG and the Planners (Minutes 19th September, 1992). It may be further noted that other bodies were interested in information from CAAG. The Community Liaison Officer of Merseyside Police in the Canning Area requested names and addresses of executive members along with minutes of meetings. A request which was denied because the reason for such a request was not at all clear. It was agreed (at the meeting of the 24th April 1992) that the Community Liaison Officer may attend, as a visitor, to speak at committee and should receive the minutes of the meeting attended only (Minutes).

these organisations had important implications for CAAG as an organisation and its relationship to the community. It was a site where conflict could have arisen between homeowners and tenants. But it did not.

In June 1992 a discussion took place between CAAG and representatives of the Planning Department over the *Strategy for Canning* document. The housing policy to be pursued was a particular concern because of its importance to community development. It may also be noted that the draft document contained little about the sources of funding to be drawn upon in order to regenerate the area's stock. As a large amount of stock in Canning was (and is) under the control of the housing associations, doubt was raised by CAAG representatives over the housing associations' capacity to improve their properties (because the funding arrangements following the 1988 Housing Act have not favoured rehabilitation, especially of such older stock which is particularly expensive). CAAG was assured that the document was realistic and informed that there was a desire to transform it into policy as soon as possible after the full Council's approval, which was granted in October 1992. Indeed, *City Challenge* representatives at these discussions suggested that the *Strategy for Canning* document

will also form a bidding document to be used to provide funding from the Housing Corporation, through the housing associations... It was vital to provide a document, and have broad

support in order to lobby for resources
(Minutes).

An exhibition was planned for January 1993 by CAAG, the Planning Department and City Challenge, as part of the consultation process, to inform members of the community about the proposals and to invite comment. The exhibition was then postponed to February (week beginning the 15th) and subsequently cancelled by the Planners. The reasons will illustrate the tensions between the various participants in the consultation process.

In the first instance, it will be remembered that the *Strategy for Canning* had been drawn up in consultation with the community (through CAAG) and had been approved by the City Council. In a letter from the Head of Planning and Development Services on the 8th of February 1993, CAAG was informed that the exhibition was being cancelled because of a need to clarify matters with the Housing Corporation and the Merseyside Task Force, in the light of funding problems resulting from the Chancellor's November Statement on public spending. It was indicated in the letter that there was 'a need to review how resources should be targeted on Canning'⁹⁶. It further suggested that these issues had been discussed at a meeting with the City Challenge Executive on the 2nd of February and that the Planners expected further responses from this body.

⁹⁶ Letter to Canning Community Worker (CAAG) from the Head of Planning and Development Services (Liverpool City Council) 8th February, 1993).

A number of individuals on the CAAG executive believed that there was pressure 'high up' in City Challenge which was bearing down on policy makers to reduce costs, and the same pressure was placing a 'renewed emphasis on the importance of regenerating Canning through the use of private investment'⁹⁷. Members of CAAG's executive felt that a mockery had been made of the consultation process. They felt that the community and CAAG were easily discarded by these bodies without being called to account for their decisions and actions. Indeed, CAAG would have to offer explanations to the community. CAAG saw themselves as a buffer between Challenge and the community.

At the following CAAG executive committee the cancelation of the exhibition was discussed. The Planners had suggested to CAAG that the exhibition be re-scheduled for the 8th of March. Members of CAAG were concerned about what was going on 'behind the scenes' that they did not know about. Through information gleaned from some of their insider contacts at the Council, a practice which developed as a practical response to inadequate and infrequent flows of information from the 'dominant authorities' to the community organisation, CAAG was informed that the Task Force and City Challenge had not approved the strategy - a decision had actually been taken. Moreover, the Planners had been asked to consider commercial and private sector investment in Canning in order to solve the problem of

⁹⁷ Interview 10th February 1993.

derelict or inadequate housing. In this sense, the Planning Department was also seen as a 'buffer organisation', they had publicly to ask for more time - hence the letter and the cancellation of the exhibition. CAAG members saw the Task force as pulling the strings on ideological grounds.

It matters little whether these processes were going on behind the scenes, what is important is that CAAG certainly believed that these behind the scenes negotiations were being conducted and that they were not involved. This had important implications for CAAG its role was to 'ensure meaningful consultation' with City Challenge, and other bodies⁹⁸. CAAG was in danger of losing its credibility with the community because it could not influence decision-making on behalf of the community. It could not keep promises with the community to inform its members when CAAG was so starved of information itself. In addition, the use of insiders for gaining information also became more important partly as a result of this, a form of conducting business which is widespread but regarded as undesirable, and a reflection of all that is wrong with City Challenge structures (notably their lack of democracy).

In CAAG's early days as a community organisation many people became involved because they believed that their

⁹⁸ Minutes of Public Meeting 13th January, 1992.

voices could be heard and that environmental, housing and other policies should be defined with their interests being fully represented. Some members of the community wanted simply to be informed, others wanted to create a 'new democracy'; they wanted community involvement in the definition of projects and funding organised around projects which showed visible results for the people of Canning (Minutes 12th March, 1992), after years of neglect they wanted 'a say'.

John Flamson (Director of City Challenge) told the public meeting in February that he expected CAAG to engage in a lobbying role with Challenge and indicated that he wanted to see a truly representative group who could undertake this role. He said that such a group could, through the Community Assembly, take part in examining the whole of the initiative, and/or undertake to identify and even deliver new projects itself. The community could become involved, then, and their voices would be heard (Minutes 27th February, 1992).

Many people who attended the public meetings at this time wanted the opportunity to participate. People were keen to join CAAG to facilitate that involvement⁹⁹. They

⁹⁹Over 60 people, representative of the mixed community in Canning, became members of CAAG at the 27th February public meeting. Public meetings regularly attracted 100-150 people, sometimes more, and the level of debate was usually indicative of a high level of interest on behalf of ordinary members of the community.

were not at all convinced that the participation mechanisms would work. CAAG was supposed to be democratic and representative of the community to be credible to Challenge. But when the community asked about democracy in Challenge, the City authorities simply perceived hostility. Some extracts from the public meeting of the 27th of February, 1992, are illustrative.

John Flamson, in his address to the meeting indicated that many discussions had been taking place 'behind closed doors' with the Department of Environment, but there were no cynical intentions behind this; he said he was interested in resident opinion. He later indicated that an 'Action Plan' had been drawn up. Members of the community then wanted to know 'How can you have an Action Plan without consultation with the community?' Flamson replied that an Action Plan is required before the DoE will commit funds. People of Canning wanted to know who made decisions about funding projects, who elected the 'Community Assembly', who were the Executive Group, who will be monitoring City Challenge, and will such information be made public? Flamson, and other members of Challenge, Merseyside and Granby/Toxteth Task Force, clearly did not expect this response. Flamson asked: *Why do you think we are not on your side?* (Minutes). The reply from the floor was *because the structures are already set up and are in place* (Minutes). The failure to support the housing policy

and the exhibition will have not helped Flamson and his colleagues to get the community on their side.

CAAG tried to establish itself as a democratic organisation which facilitates the involvement of the wider community in CAAG policy and in wider planning policy. To this end, CAAG organises street meetings where residents can express views and set priorities and where CAAG can survey opinion (Chair's Report, 1993). The community worker and members of the executive have always recognised the need to secure greater involvement of ordinary community members in CAAG business. But the organisations and agencies with whom CAAG liaises are often unhelpful in this process. Their ability to control information and to set agendas and timescales has meant that CAAG has been forced to respond in a particular fashion, such as by using insiders and by becoming directly involved in formulating policy, without detailed consultation with the community.

It may also be noted that CAAG was forced to build checks and balances into its structures, despite real concerns to be open and democratic. In particular, members of the CAAG executive committee were concerned to avoid 'entryism', especially in the weeks following CAAG's first General Meeting. In the middle of March (1992) notices went out to members of the community informing them that CAAG would be holding its inaugural meeting: reporting on the City Challenge bid (for a community worker and

community centre); giving a financial statement; and to elect its Executive Committee. The notice of the General Meeting had a nomination form attached and any member of the Canning community could put themselves forward as a nominee for the executive. Such nominees must live within the Canning boundaries as set out in the constitution, and indicated on the nomination form, and must also be members of CAAG, although people could join on the night. The first General Meeting was subsequently held at St. Brides Church, Catherine Street, Canning on the 1st of April, 1992.

The early part of the business of CAAG's first General Meeting proceeded in a quick, orderly fashion. When discussing 'the bid', members of the community were concerned over the speed by which bids had to be submitted, and a number of people were confused about the Challenge Area, many assumed that the City Challenge initiative covered the whole of Liverpool, but in general there was little out of the ordinary to report. That was until the business of electing the new CAAG executive. The official minutes record that

There was a contentious debate over some of the nominations. The meeting had been attended by people who had intended to join the executive but who did not reside in the Canning Area¹⁰⁰, although they had business interests in the area. Nevertheless, some of these nominations did not acknowledge this

¹⁰⁰ It was believed that these people trying to gain entry to CAAG lived outside Canning but within Liverpool 8.

situation, nor did the persons concerned disclose to the meeting their residential address..... There was an animated discussion around whether such nominations should be accepted or not (Minutes).

A motion was passed which said that the nominations should not be accepted, that only people actually residing in the area, proposed and seconded by residents of the area, should be allowed to become members of the Executive (Minutes 1 April, 1992; Agreed 26th May, 1993).

The notion of contentious debate does not really describe the attempts made by some business people in the area to enter the executive. The meeting was, rather, severely disrupted by these individuals. The nature of the events were not reflected in the minutes because it was felt that AGM meetings should be reported as formally as possible, and that other, more powerful groups, can benefit from such apparent splits in the community.

As an observer I felt that those individuals who tried to gain entry to the CAAG executive tried to do so in a very aggressive manner. They paced up and down the meeting hall and verbally abused the Chair of the meeting, especially when their nominations were not accepted. There were protestations that although they were not residents of the area, their business interests should be represented, but no attempts were made to show how these individuals could contribute to either CAAG's stated aims and objectives or the wider Canning community. The meeting was

deliberately disrupted. A number of people in the meeting hall indicated that they felt uneasy, intimidated and unable to contribute further to the meeting (many people simply left the meeting at this point). Members of the black community in Canning also felt uneasy because whilst they disagreed with the 'entryists' they felt unable to criticise them publicly because it 'would be seen as highlighting divisions which people can exploit'¹⁰¹ because a number of those concerned were also from the black community. A number of people were reluctant to discuss what happened at CAAG's first AGM.

The experiences of the first General Meeting led CAAG to be wary about extending membership to those who work in the area but who do not reside in Canning¹⁰². Workers could be invited at the discretion of the executive if it is thought on behalf of the Executive that such individuals can benefit CAAG's aims and objectives. At the same time the membership secretary was developing the idea of having street representatives to build stronger links with the community. It was felt that

communication and a vigorous grass roots support would counter the 'entryism' that [the secretary] had referred to earlier. A newsletter should be produced each month (Minutes 15th July, 1992).

¹⁰¹ Interview 7th April, 1992.

¹⁰² Minutes 15th July, 1992.

These attempts to maintain and strengthen CAAG's links with the wider community were largely instead of the use of public meeting in the following months. This put limits on both CAAG's ability to communicate with the community, and on the democratic nature of decision-making in the organisation, which had started out as an organisation which had decisions ratified by the wider community at public meetings.

In conclusion we may note that there was a high level of involvement and interest CAAG's activities in relation to issues concerned with the local built and green environment in Canning. Residents expressed desires to maximise use-values (and were against policies which appeared to be concerned with the exchange value of property in Canning). People were able, despite disparate interests, to form alliances in pursuit of goals. Those who formed, or became involved in CAAG, and those who attended its public meetings did so because they wanted an input into decision-making. But many became disillusioned with the participation they experienced. It is not, however, possible to say what the future will hold in this context because the process of participation is not a static affair (this will be explored in the following chapter).

The Canning study shows that good reasons are needed to pull the community together. In this case, years of

neglect and feelings of abandonment led a community, with some highly experienced lobbyists (those who had been involved in associational life for many years), to mobilise. Alliances with powerful groups will be made if it is felt to be in their interests, but alliances are *fragile* and issue dependent. The way powerful bodies were viewed was subject to considerable change. It should be noted that in a community like Canning were an organisation, or community worker, seeks to unite disparate interests within and between a number of existing associations (and powerful individuals), and past ones, it is very likely that problems will be encountered because they often have their own agendas.

My central theoretical question in relation to the Canning study was to examine the importance of tenure in the community action which emerged there. My core finding was that tenure did not, during the fieldwork period, divide the community or its action. This conclusion reflects a more complicated picture than the housing class thesis suggested.

It was difficult to assess the importance of divisions along the lines of social class. The CAAG executive did appear to have professional people over-represented, and there were occasions when working class members thought that they were being excluded from decision-making. But the data was insufficient to draw any firm conclusions.

Publicly CAAG had the support of the wider (mixed) community. The desire to be a fully representative community organisation was recognised by the executive committee and attempts were being made to be more representative. The data suggested that there were few visible tensions along the lines of 'race' in the period observed but, again, it was difficult to be conclusive. There are also methodological problems with assessing the importance of gender divisions. It did appear to be the case that political orientation and the personal preoccupations of executive members were important in directing policy in the community organisation, but in most cases this was seen, by the wider community, and the CAAG executive as a whole, as being in relation to uncontroversial matters which the majority regarded as needing to be addressed.

The historical background outlined in the earlier part of the chapter has provided some basis for understanding the complex social base of Canning and has problematised the idea of residential community as such a social base which can promote mobilisation. In stark contrast to Peel Road, for example, there is no homogenous stable community from which to draw support. The complexity of the social base, and the interests involved in Canning, mean that there is the potential to organise (and the reality of organisation) there but it is fragile. Activists will need to address the issue of high mobilisation in the initial

stages, and the possibility that it may short lived (in the medium to long term) as interest is difficult to sustain. But that should not preclude the possibility of new groups emerging like a phoenix from dying community associations. This is the historical experience of Canning.

Activists have had to face the problem of being used as a buffer, as support, to give weight to projects developed by more powerful organisations, and that are justified by them as being in the wider interests of 'the community'. CAAG will also have to address issues of strategy. It has already been forced to develop certain forms of strategies to deal with its relations with the dominant authorities in Merseyside: insider contacts and high levels of community mobilisation, and they have also had to develop mechanisms to avoid CAAG being taken over by particular interests. Such challenges to CAAG's organisation will not fade away. CAAG's ability to survive will depend to a large extent on its ability to innovate.

CAAG's credibility with the community is clearly an important issue, and one which will determine its future. But CAAG is limited by the sanctions available. Even though the dominant authorities need CAAG it cannot force their compliance as the struggle over the housing policy showed.

The study of CAAG and Canning has allowed us to examine alliances amongst housing consumers. It recognises the importance of housing as use-value and it has demonstrated the importance of including the changing nature of central-local relations within an analysis. And has, therefore, provided the basis of criticising Lowe's (1986) focus on the local authority as the focal point in struggles occurring at the local level. It does support Lowe's emphasis on the importance of 'historical and institutional realities' in shaping the tactical responses community groups make to urban policy¹⁰³.

¹⁰³ see Chapter Four for an expanded discussion of these issues.

Chapter Six

Power in the locality: the relationships between 'dominant authorities' and residents' groups

In this chapter I expand further the importance of including suppliers in the analysis. The chapter has the aim of exploring the nature of relationships between dominant authorities/ suppliers and residents' and tenants' groups - introduced in Chapter Five - which are currently formalised in participation arrangements. These arrangements allow newcomers participants the possibility to influence policy but they can also place limits on the residents' and tenants' associations' capacity to take action in furtherance of their interests. The chapter seeks to illustrate the complex, dynamic nature of participation relationships, and to show how they depict something of the nature of power and politics in localities. Participation relationships therefore raise important methodological issues for researchers in this area whilst also raising pivotal issues for tenant activists. The chapter focuses on relationships between voluntary sector (housing associations) suppliers and residents'/tenants' groups and in doing so seeks to extend Saunders' thesis which was deemed too reliant upon the private sector model.

Having established that we cannot see suppliers simply in terms described by Saunders¹⁰⁴, and recognised the need to include other agencies operating at the local level, it

¹⁰⁴ in Chapter Two.

is necessary now to say more clearly what is meant by 'dominant authorities', before examining the way that these have established relationships with residents' or tenants' groups. Those agencies who may be referred to as 'dominant authorities' were indicated in the previous chapter: they included, for example, the City Challenge Executive, Merseyside Task Force, housing associations and the City Council. Each authority is, to a greater or lesser degree, able to derive authority from their legitimacy in law, and ability to raise or control resources, enabling them to define and/or implement urban policy which, in turn, has an impact upon community and residents' groups who lack the capacity to do so.

Participation and housing management

The idea of tenant involvement in the way housing associations manage their services has gained currency in recent years, especially since the mid-late 1980s. Although interest in tenant participation has been present for much longer in some local authorities' housing departments (Richardson, 1979; 1983), and housing associations (Pickering, 1974). Yet, as Ann Richardson has shown, the concepts of participation and involvement are rarely discussed. The aims, objectives, strategies and outcomes, for all involved in such initiatives, are often misunderstood, contributing to disappointment for the parties concerned. Richardson made these observations on

the basis of her own empirical studies, but the analysis in *Thinking about Participation and Participation* remains on the general, and rather abstract level. Richardson recognises that 'much can only be assessed in the light of data on real participation schemes' (Richardson, 1983: 97). More recent papers on participation such as Croft and Beresford's discussion of *The Politics of Participation* (1992) in social policy appears not to be based upon the empirical study of participation schemes in practice. Clapham and Kintrea (1994) did look at resident involvement as part of a more wide-ranging study of the Community Ownership programme in Scotland. Their study was conducted between 1986 and 1990 and evaluated the Community Ownership programme in six areas in terms of the involvement of residents, the effectiveness of housing management, impact upon the neighbourhood and a financial appraisal (Clapham and Kintrea, 1994). This study offers interesting insights but does not aim to evaluate the qualitative experience of the operation of tenant participation as its core concern. This chapter, therefore, aims to comment on the way that tenant participation has been established in two large, long established, housing associations in Merseyside: Merseyside Improved Houses and Liverpool Housing Trust, and to contribute to an important new area in the study of social policy.

Ann Richardson has written of the problems of interpreting data on tenant participation, suggesting that

the view of one author may not correspond with the interpretations of other writers (Richardson, 1983). This is not surprising given that 'the process of participation is in any context a fundamentally political one' (Richardson, 1979: 242). In this chapter I clarify some of these processes by looking at the idea of participation, some of the reasons for the recent interest in participation in housing, and the problems of evaluating participation arrangements. I look first at the way participation is organised in MIH and then make comparisons with the operation of tenant involvement/participation in LHT. In drawing these comparisons I offer reasons for variations in levels of participation in certain localities and the variations between the two organisations in their participation arrangements. Before concluding the chapter I discuss briefly some of the forms of participation which have taken place in inner-Liverpool which do not refer directly to housing issues.

The introduction of tenant participation schemes: background

Interest in tenant involvement in housing management issues was especially strong during the 1970s, from the point of view of both tenants and local authorities, although arguments for better relationships between landlords and tenants pre-date this period (Hood, 1990; Richardson, 1983). A number of writers have drawn attention to the struggles of council tenants to obtain

information, consultation and involvement in the way their housing is managed, sometimes successfully, sometimes not (see Jacobs, 1975). Similarly, some local authority housing departments showed interest in developing tenant participation schemes in this period (Richardson, 1983). It is argued that councillors and officers, for political and professional reasons respectively, believed it necessary to establish a system for obtaining and disseminating information to and from tenants, a necessity which became more pertinent as authorities expanded their stock. Local government reorganisation in 1974, large scale slum clearance, new build and municipalisation of other property, together with the bureaucratic layers which accompanied such expansion, resulted in a gap between policy makers and tenants which needed to be bridged (Richardson, 1983). Housing associations have been slower to develop such schemes (Hood, 1990). The housing association movement's expansion is relatively recent in comparison to that of local authority housing departments, and in the main follows the 1974 Housing Act. Nevertheless, there are some early examples of tenant participation initiatives in housing associations (see Pickering, 1974 for example).

The expansion of the voluntary housing movement during the 1980s, like that of the local authority housing departments of the late 1960s and 1970s, has witnessed a corresponding growth in interest in tenant participation.

MIH and LHT both initiated their present schemes for tenant participation towards the end of the 1980s.

Unlike during the 1970s, tenants now have the statutory right to be consulted and informed about housing management issues under the provisions of the 1980 and 1985 Housing Acts, and the 1986 Housing and Planning Act (guidance on this issue was provided by the DoE and the Housing Corporation in the 1970s)¹⁰⁵. The 1988 Housing Act, through a variety of provisions especially Tenants' Choice and, in respect of local authorities, the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act, has made it important for both local authorities and housing associations to develop good relations with tenants (Hood, 1990). But, what does it mean to have a statutory right to be consulted? What does involvement and participation refer to in the modern context?

¹⁰⁵ The Mersey Region of the Housing Corporation produced a *Tenant Participation Strategy 1993-1996* in which the Housing Corporation set its objectives for tenant participation. The most important point was that the 'level of accountability given by housing association landlords will directly affect that association's capital funding. the higher the level of tenant control in schemes, the more certain will capital funding for that scheme be' (*Tenant Participation Guide*, LHT n.d). As this document was issued to tenants after the fieldwork period (in early 1994) it is referred to here for information only.

What is 'participation'?

Ann Richardson (1983) has argued that participation refers to a number of activities by which those affected by a service take some part in policy formation or implementation. It may refer to observing, contributing information, advising and/or the final stage of decision-making with those who previously carried out this function without the newcomers participants (Richardson, 1979). Richardson emphasised that it is necessary to separate the process of taking part from that of decision-making, but it is the process of interaction that constitutes participation.

From the recognition that various levels of involvement need to be distinguished from the action of decision-making, a number of writers have organised participation schemes hierarchically according to the degree of power residents and tenants have in decision-making structures (see Arnstein, 1969; Ward, 1974; Hood, 1990). In general these locate delegated decision-making powers held by tenants, for example, at the top of the hierarchy, and the receipt of landlord information about decisions already made at the foot of the ladder, with various degrees of involvement and influence facilitating mechanisms in between. Many of these models contain the assumptions that the more a structure favours tenants, the less it will favour landlords and vice versa (Richardson,

1979). Tenant participation schemes, will therefore, reflect the distribution of power held by landlords and tenants respectively, and the outcomes of these initiatives will reflect the power struggles that take place between tenants and housing authorities (Richardson, 1979). However, Richardson (1979) was concerned to emphasise that outcomes cannot be assumed from formal participation mechanisms. Moreover, she stressed the importance of not misunderstanding the activity of participation, which is the institutionalisation of bargaining between policy makers and users of services. Outcomes cannot be accurately predicted and the interests involved cannot be assumed to be inherently incongruent between the participating parties. Once this is understood, the variety of expectations concerning both the process of participation and its outcomes can be appreciated. The interests of the participants and the decision-makers may sometimes coincide, for example over the broad objective of having good housing management (though there may be debates over what this actually entails) yet on other issues may fundamentally differ. Similarly, interests may meet and diverge at different times, the point is that there is both potential agreement and conflict at any given time. In this sense we can see that participation is a fundamentally political process as Richardson (1979) and Croft and Beresford (1992) emphasise. It is a power struggle, there are interests, conflicts and compromises; agreements and bargains. However, it is also has to be recognised that

power is not vested equally between the parties involved in tenant participation. To suggest that outcomes cannot be predicted from the way that participation is established, or from the aims of the instigators, may lead to the conclusion that outcomes are determined at the point of negotiation. It is clear, however, that some forms of participation allow some parties more power than others to negotiate outcomes which accord with their own interests.

Richardson (1983) has indicated that most tenant participation schemes provide tenants with advisory powers. Tenants may, therefore, be able to influence policy-making. Other forms of interaction between landlords and tenants may not allow tenants to influence decision-making, yet may still be included under the rubric of participation in housing management given that the interaction process itself is the essence of participation (Richardson, 1983: 28). The provision of information to tenants about housing management issues or decisions is one such example. This can be seen, in Richardson's terms, as *indirect* participation, but one giving little scope for tenants to influence housing management.

A number of studies have indicated that tenants have been involved in struggles over the right to information as an issue in itself (see Jacobs, 1975 for example). In earlier chapters I have shown how this was important for residents and tenants in contemporary Merseyside and

Runcorn. But it can also be noted that in the modern context the initiative to provide service users with information about the services they receive has come from government departments and senior staff in those services (Turney, 1987 cited in Pollitt, 1988) rather than as a response to meeting user demand.

Following a Department of Environment commissioned study in 1989, *The Nature and Effectiveness of Housing Management in England*, all social landlords were asked to provide information measuring their performance as landlords. These performance indicators, according to Kearns and Smith (1989), have concentrated upon so called 'value for money' issues and, as Pollitt (1988) has argued, performance measures rarely have user involvement in the design and operation of these schemes. Indeed, service users are usually considered at the end of the process where it is assumed that they will be the beneficiaries of improved performance (Pollitt, 1988). Information provided as a result of these recent initiatives may enhance the power of service users. But this may be neither the aim, intention nor the effect of such initiatives (Pollitt, 1988).

Pollitt (1988) has questioned the extent to which information provided through performance indicators can empower service users despite their advocacy in the rhetoric of consumerism and consumer sovereignty. The

evidence suggests that these concepts are rarely transferable from the private sector to the social sector as often suggested, especially when services are provided on the basis of need and, almost by definition, imply limited choice for the user (Pollitt, 1988). Nevertheless, these terms continue to be used uncritically by many social sector providers. Merseyside Improved Houses' Chief Executive, for example, has compared the provision of housing services to the experience of shopping in a supermarket or department store¹⁰⁶. It has also been argued that the concept of consumer is essentially individualistic (Kearns and Smith, 1989). It follows, then, that even if policies are designed to empower the consumer, this does not necessarily imply empowering groups of consumers, on a collective basis.

What, then, do tenants want from tenant participation schemes? Marieanne Hood of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) has argued that tenants want to be properly consulted and to have a real involvement in the way their housing is managed (Hood, 1990). Tenant participation, in this sense, means....

a two way process involving the sharing of information and ideas, where tenants are able to influence decisions and take part in what is happening (Hood, 1990: 72).

¹⁰⁶ Natton, B. (1989) *The Future for Housing Associations* Paper Presented to the *Housing Policies for the Future* Conference 15th May, 1989.

This accords with tenant responses in this research. This idea of what tenants want from participation illustrates the inadequacy of initiatives like performance indicators because they concentrate overwhelmingly on one-way information flows, from landlord to tenant. The desire on behalf of tenants to influence decisions, to have the 'right to a say', demonstrates the need to have a greater level of involvement than initiatives like these suggest.

It may be possible to examine tenant participation schemes in terms of the extent to which information flows in both directions and the capacity for tenants to influence outcomes. However, the evaluation of tenant participation schemes in this way is fraught with problems because, as Richardson has argued, many schemes can only be assessed in the light of their stated aims and objectives. The effects of schemes cannot be used in this way, principally because tenant participation is a *bargaining process*. The problematic nature of assessing tenant participation schemes is exacerbated when such aims and objectives are not made clear, when policies are vague, and the terms contained in policies are ambiguous. Terms like participation and involvement allow different interests to come together, rather like the idea of community, especially when they are not defined. Many tenant participation policies are made at such a general level that it is not clear what involvement does mean. If aims and objectives effectively remain off the agenda, how then

does an organisation, its tenants, or, indeed, the researcher, assess the progress of tenant participation schemes? It is clear that performance indicators would do little to aid an analysis of tenant participation because of their over-concentration on value for money aspects of housing management, extremely difficult to assess in the case of tenant participation.

Nevertheless it is possible to look at tenant participation policy; the way that this operates in practice in an organisation; to look at the interaction of tenants and representatives of the landlord; to obtain impressions about the way the organisation views participation, and to survey tenant opinion of tenant participation policy. It is to these issues that we now turn.

Merseyside Improved Houses' tenant participation scheme

MIH's *Policy for the 90's* (sic) document contains three statements about tenant participation. The first states that....

tenants should be encouraged to participate in and influence the nature and quality of the services they receive (page 8)

in its section on *Housing Management*. Under a sub-heading of *Participation* in the document's *Development* section MIH says that

wherever possible, the Association seeks to involve tenants and residents in the development of their housing through participative design, co-operative housing, and feedback surveys (page 11).

Finally, in the section on *Accountability*, the MIH group records that it believes that the organisation has sought to strengthen its accountability by having three co-opted tenants on its Committee of Management, by providing information to tenants and residents, by 'encouraging tenant participation in a variety of ways' and by 'assessing tenant and resident satisfaction in a variety of ways' (page 19). It is clear that these statements are very vague. The document says little about its strategies for achieving these objectives, which are, at best, ambiguous. The organisation, its tenants, and the researcher are left with a precarious starting point for the evaluation of its tenant participation policy. Indeed, MIH's Central Tenants' Association has replied to the document in these terms¹⁰⁷. However, it may be possible to look at the extent to which tenants are encouraged to participate in housing management and development by examining the operation of tenant participation in practice. Before returning to these issues it may be helpful to outline briefly the structure of MIH and tenant participation in the organisation.

¹⁰⁷ Central Tenants' Association Comments on *Policy for the 90's* (sic) document n.d.

Merseyside Improved Houses is one of the longest established housing associations in Britain, it is also one of the biggest. Founded in 1928 (as Liverpool Improved Houses) it has grown into the fourth largest housing association in the country. MIH, at the time of the fieldwork, comprised a number of linked, though separate organisations. As a charitable housing association it was managing a stock of approximately 16,000 properties¹⁰⁸ for rent across Merseyside from its six regional offices, with central headquarters in Wavertree, Liverpool. Private finance has been used increasingly to fund its developments although it continues to use Housing Corporation funding for both improvement and new build operations. The MIH Group also includes two other housing associations, MIH Special Projects Housing Association Ltd (MIHSPHA), which focuses on low-cost home ownership and co-operative schemes, and MIH Harbour Housing Association, a charitable association mainly providing sheltered housing schemes. In total the Group employed over 500 staff and had an annual turnover in the region of £40 million at the time of the research. The MIH Group also includes other semi-autonomous organisations such as MIH Design Services (MDS) and Community Projects Advisory Service (CPAS). Although this chapter is mainly concerned with the way that tenant participation is pursued in the charitable housing associations MIH and LHT, it is worth including a note on MDS and CPAS. MDS provides an architectural and design

¹⁰⁸ About the size of a small local authority.

service, mainly for MIH's regional offices but increasingly for outside groups in order to generate income. On the other hand CPAS is constituted as a service to the community and is not expected to be self financing. CPAS aims to work with community and voluntary groups of various kinds and is often asked to become involved in a plethora of different initiatives. This often means helping groups to get organised, although it could mean almost anything that CPAS can do to assist groups in the voluntary and community sector. CPAS works closely with MDS in the assistance of groups developing self build schemes and community centres¹⁰⁹.

MIH has expanded rapidly over recent years - its rented stock doubled to approximately 16,000 units between 1980 and 1991 and the organisation had plans to expand its stock further. The organisation stated its commitment to the continuation of work in inner-city areas but expressed an interest in expanding its work into neighbouring counties, notably Cheshire. To an extent this desire to expand has been facilitated by the acquisition of properties from the former Runcorn Development Corporation, discussed in Chapter Four. During this period of rapid growth, MIHSPHA and Harbour were established to facilitate the growth and change in the nature of housing provision advocated as part and parcel of the 1980's national housing

¹⁰⁹ Interviews Friday 29th November 1991 and 5th December 1991.

policies. MIH presents the observer with an image of a huge and expanding organisation; accommodating, if not embracing, the ideas of consumerism, value for money, and private investment emerging during the 1980s, while still trying to maintain a notion of community orientation. This is reflected both through the work of CPAS and in its tenant participation policy. However, one also receives the impression that MIH's tenant involvement is very much a top-down affair and that the organisation has a paternalistic attitude towards tenant involvement¹¹⁰.

Tenant participation in MIH is a complex arrangement, not surprising given the structure of the organisation, and this contributes to the top-down image referred to above. MIH's Committee of Management has three co-opted tenant members, and tenants have the right to send two observers to meetings. Tenant observers can speak at meetings although they do not have voting rights. Observers serve on a six monthly basis only. Tenants have found this situation quite frustrating because they are often only then becoming familiar with the proceedings.

Kearns and Smith (1989) have argued that housing association committees of management are increasingly dominated by people who are owner-occupiers, professionals,

¹¹⁰ This impression is not intended to refer to CPAS and its workings with community groups. Certainly, this is not the impression I received when interviewing and observing the MDS and CPAS staff at work. Rather, I am referring to MIH's main function as a charitable housing association.

managers or other white-collar workers. It is suggested that committees of management in this context serve to ensure the accountability of associations in an upward direction, to the Housing Corporation and government, rather than downwards to tenants, residents, and local communities. In the case of MIH the Committee of Management certainly does not reflect the make up of the communities it claims to serve. The management committee is all white, male dominated, and contains a disproportionate number of professional people¹¹¹. However, the fact that the Committee of Management does not mirror the make up of the association's tenancy is not sufficient evidence from which to argue that the association does not respond adequately to tenants. While the Committee of Management has to ensure the implementation of Housing Corporation directives and would not automatically act in the interests of tenants, this does not itself mean that tenants' views go unheard. But, if the association's management committee is in fact moulded by the association's senior staff, as Kearns and Smith (1989) have argued many association are, then it could be suggested that the Committee of Management may well reflect the interests of staff rather than tenants. But this should open up empirical questions rather than lead to firm conclusions. To what extent does the decision-making machinery reflect staff, tenant, and/or other interests? Do these decision-making structures allow

¹¹¹ MIH Yearbook 1992.

tenants to 'influence decisions and take part in what is happening' (Hood, 1990: 72)? How effective are the two-way information flows? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to look beyond tenant involvement on the Committee of Management to the other mechanisms that have been established in MIH to facilitate tenant involvement.

Perhaps the main place where the association's staff come into contact with tenants is at Tenant Participation Forum (TPF) meetings and Residents' Advisory Group (RAG) meetings. TPF meetings take place on a bi-monthly basis at the central office. RAG meetings, are organised on a more local basis, in the areas where MIH controls property and has regional offices, referred to as 'the regions'. The TPF is made up of representatives from the Resident Advisory Groups, MIH staff, the Chief Executive and some members of the Committee of Management. The RAGs in the regions (Liverpool North, Liverpool South, Sefton, Wirral, Runcorn, St. Helens and Knowsley) are made up of representatives from local tenants' and residents' associations and various other, appointed, individuals depending upon how membership has evolved at local level. These structures are not the locales of decision-making in MIH. While decisions which change the policies of the organisation are made, or at least ratified, at Committee of Management meetings, those that do not involve policy changes, but refer instead to the implementation of existing policies, are taken in other meetings, notably at

Directors' meetings (each region has its own directorship), and housing manager's meetings. Indeed, while tenants at the TPF may request information regarding discussions and decisions that have taken place at the Committee of Management, minutes of these and other meetings, or information about what has taken place at these meetings, are rarely made available as a *matter of course* to tenants. Although some workers in the organisation may elect to provide tenants with this information. Before examining in detail the way that tenant participation works in MIH it may be useful to examine some of the reasons why tenant participation takes this form.

Ann Richardson (1983) argued that it is not possible to predict the outcomes of tenant participation schemes from the formal mechanisms that are introduced to facilitate tenant involvement. Although, it is possible to argue that the reasons underlying the introduction of a scheme may influence the type of tenant participation arrangements and that these, in turn, will condition the type and level of tenant involvement in a housing authority. The factors promoting a tenant participation scheme are not, however, simple to identify. An organisation may not be clear about its reasons for introducing tenant participation. There may be different rationales at different levels in the organisation and between workers in the association. Professionals may give reasons for the introduction of schemes to the various

committees in the organisation which differ to those given in its literature or to its tenants whose involvement it is seeking. A housing association may introduce a scheme because a Housing Corporation directive tells the association to do so, or because it is part of the association's attempt to strengthen its accountability downwards to the tenants, or because key decision-makers believe that tenants have the right to be involved, for example. Alternatively there may be a combination of reasons held in and between different groups in the organisation. As such, it is insufficient to rely solely on the organisation's stated aims behind the policy. It may be useful to look at the arrangements and the reasoning behind the form of participation that an organisation has introduced for some of the association's objectives. But this tells us little of the reasons to initiate a policy in the first instance. Therefore, it may be of use to distinguish, albeit rather artificially in some senses, between some of the structural, external and macro level influences on the introduction of tenant participation schemes in general, and the more micro-level influences within the organisation and its tenancy.

On the general level, it was indicated earlier that there was a great deal of interest in developing tenant participation schemes in council housing departments and, to a lesser degree, among tenants in the 1970s. Richardson (1983) indicated that the need for stronger links with

tenants felt by officers and members during the expansion of housing departments, at this time, was the main impetus for the introduction of schemes. Richardson noted that the form of tenant participation often involved giving tenants advisory powers, either at the central authority level or, less commonly, in some form of local arrangement. These arrangements often acted as 'complaint forums' although where modernisation programmes were planned tenants were sometimes given the scope for greater involvement. The main point to note is that the decision to develop these initiatives came as a rational response from the local authorities, especially housing management professionals, in the context of rapid expansion. Even when statutory rights were given to tenants in the Housing Act 1980, Richardson has argued that this was probably not the result of tenants' demands. In short, it has been the needs of the service providers that have put the issue of tenant participation on the political agenda.

The expansion of the housing association movement has been more recent but similar processes can be observed. The situation is, however, complicated by other factors. Importantly, a debate emerged among housing professionals and academics during the 1980s over the accountability of associations to the communities they serve¹¹². Unlike local authorities, who were able to claim legitimacy from

¹¹² This was a major issue during the National Federation of Housing Associations Conference 'Towards 2000' Held at the University of Liverpool 21-23rd September, 1990 for example.

the fact that policy was decided by the council, elected by local people, housing associations could make no such claim. This factor, together with the rapid expansion of the movement before and beyond the Housing Act 1988, which promoted the movement as the major force in social housing, meant that the issue of strengthening links with tenants became more urgent. As indicated above, the impact of local government legislation, the 1988 Housing Act and the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act for example, on local authorities and on housing association expansion has made the issue even more pertinent.

It is also important to note that 1980's housing legislation, including the Housing Act 1980 which introduced the statutory right of tenants to be consulted and informed, ought to be seen in the context of other central government policies which have reduced the power of local authorities and their scope to provide housing and other services directly (see for example the 1988 Local Government Act which extended central government's policy of contracting out local government services). While housing associations have been used, at least in part, as a substitute for what would have otherwise been local authority provided social housing and as a competitor against local authorities, the government (through the Housing Corporation) is also exercising increased levels of control over the housing associations. Reductions in Revenue Deficit Grant has had an effect on the ability of

housing associations to set preferred rent levels. The Housing Act 1988 has had an impact on development decisions, through the necessity to seek private finance, and this in turn has had implications for the level of risk involved in decisions concerning new-build and rehabilitation, often resulting in a preference for new-build. The Housing Corporation is able to determine issues such as the level of public investment in a locality, and, indeed, can define the central concept of 'housing need' (Kearns and Smith, 1989). Thus, in view of the restrictions on the operations of local authorities and housing associations, we might ask questions about the scope for tenants to influence policy making at the local level.

There is little doubt that these trends have contributed towards putting the issue of tenant participation firmly on MIH's agenda. Professionals in the organisation¹¹³ would be exposed to the issue of tenant participation and the debate over housing association accountability, through their training, professional organisations and other bodies such as the National Federation of Housing Associations. The rapid expansion of MIH during the 1980s would highlight the distance between those housing managers who regularly come into contact with tenants and the policy makers at senior levels in the

¹¹³ I recognise that there would be different interests within this group.

organisation. Housing professionals would become aware of the advantages, as service providers, of tenant participation. These advantages are usually articulated in terms of the recognition that housing management which is responsive to tenants, and their needs and preferences, would result in increased satisfaction on their behalf. In turn this would lead to better communication between tenants and landlords and a deeper understanding of the problems faced by each could be obtained; better decisions would be made, and a more cost effective service would emerge (Richardson, 1979; 1983; Hood, 1990). Other advantages are often cited: greater tenant control can have wider implications for the estates where tenant activists live, reduced levels of vandalism and anti-social behaviour for example. Although these types of arguments have little validity since they are based on the assumption that tenant activists are able to exercise control over anti-social neighbours, assumptions that are not borne out by evidence (Richardson, 1979). The argument carries even less weight in the case of housing associations where properties may be scattered around a locality. Housing associations are unlikely to own whole estates as in the case of local authorities.

Richardson (1979) drew attention to the way tenant participation is opposed or promoted by a range of people irrespective of their political persuasion. In a broad sense this may be the case, but there is some evidence to

suggest that people of particular political orientations are particularly open to forms of tenant involvement which extend tenant control. People involved in the Communist Party for example have had a tradition of political organising on housing estates as well as supporting workplace struggles¹¹⁴. Although some may regard tenant participation as landlord manipulation rather than a first step towards a more general politicisation (Croft and Beresford, 1992). The main point is that there are different views within housing professionals about the desirability and form of tenant participation, even though on a public level it is a policy that is difficult to argue against (Richardson, 1979). It is clear from the field data that there are many different views within housing management regarding the desirability of tenant participation and the way it has been implemented in Merseyside.

Richardson has pointed out that few studies have looked at the impact of tenant participation on service providers; studies tend to focus on the impact on tenants. However, she does suggest that some policy makers and implementors resent the loss of freedom to make decisions in the way they would wish. Other housing workers welcome the move to involve others in that process and experience

¹¹⁴ Charlie Johnstone (1992) Paper presented to the *Beyond the Rent Strike: Housing and Tenants' Struggles in the West of Scotland after 1915* Conference: Scottish Labour History Society: Glasgow.

a greater sense of 'well-being' as a result. These points seem to be borne out in the case of MIH, although it remains difficult to assess the impact of these views on the way tenant participation policy was shaped in MIH in the first instance: Firstly, while housing professionals may have had an idea of what tenant participation meant to them, there is no way of knowing how the policy would work out in practice. Secondly, housing professionals may not discuss their scepticism publicly.

It is evident that the decision to initiate a tenant participation policy at MIH did come from housing professionals in the organisation, rather than from tenants. Like professionals in the organisation, tenants attach different meanings to tenant participation. But it is clear that there was little demand from the 'grass-roots' for the introduction of the policy. Some of the existing tenants' groups and individual tenants were, however, very interested in having 'more of a say' in the way their housing was managed before the present policy was formally initiated¹¹⁵. However, lacking a coherent voice, it was unlikely that these tenants influenced the way the policy developed. In addition, the tenants' groups that have been established as part of the tenant participation initiative have different views about their roles and relationships to MIH. There is also disagreement over

¹¹⁵ Interview with members of Wirral Tenants' Association after their meeting of the 4th of December, 1991.

these issues within tenants' groups in some areas. For example, some tenants' groups clearly see themselves as a pressure group to obtain improved services for tenants (such as Wirral Tenants' Association and the Runcorn Groups), others see themselves as having a more social function. Tenants' groups may also see their role as one of a pressure group, not in relation to the landlord, but more in relation to local/environmental issues. Groups may find themselves with a combination of these roles and functions, which can vary over time. The critical point is that there are different interests and intentions within the tenancy.

The way policy developed in MIH was the outcome of struggle between the different interests within the organisation, including its tenants; a reflection of the differential power held by various groups in the association. The need, on behalf of senior management, for local information and consultation, in order that better decisions could be made, together with Housing Corporation guidelines, seemed to be the main forces behind the present form of tenant participation. The desire for tenant advice is reflected in a report to the Directors' Meeting dated the 6th of July 1987, written by one of the regional directors, which states in its paragraph on the role of the Residents' Advisory Group (later the Tenant Participation Forum), that its function is to be....

advisory to the Chief Executive. This means any recommendations made by the

group will need to be put to a later Directors' Meeting, unless any areas of authority are delegated to the group. If any recommendation by the Group involves a change in policy, they will also need to be submitted to the Committee of Management [emphasis added].

In addition, the Residents' Advisory Groups in MIH's regions have the primary role of advising the local Director.

It is important to recognise that the aims of a policy may not be reflected in observed outcomes, precisely because the process is one of *bargaining* (Richardson, 1979). The process is dynamic and there may be unintended consequences. In this context we may look at the extent to which better decisions are made as a result of this consultative process in order to assess the contribution of tenant participation policy from the point of view of the housing association. But there are problems with this approach. Firstly, there is an assumption that the interests of tenants and decision-makers are coincident, and that to bring together local knowledge and management expertise would result in improved housing management decisions, thus facilitating a reduction in costs and an improvement in resident satisfaction. However, tenants' interests may not be the same as those of housing managers. Secondly, without proper training tenants may find it difficult to participate effectively. Indeed, it is possible for tenants to be mistaken in their view of a local problem and may be unable to offer detached views on

how solutions could be achieved. Better decisions, therefore, may not follow.

Some of these problems may be overcome if associations can provide a thorough and relevant training programme and if there is broad based tenant representation at the local level. MIH is impressive in terms of the former but rather lacking in the latter. Indeed, this constitutes one of the major problems in MIH's tenant participation programme.

It is important to look at the extent to which MIH achieves its stated aim of 'encouraging involvement in a number of ways'. But the difficulty of assessing levels of participation both in MIH or more generally must be acknowledged. Tenants' groups may have been organised autonomously, without the assistance of MIH staff or other professionals, in response to issues that are affecting residents. Such issues may be associated with threats to their homes or immediate environment where they may respond as a pressure group, as in Runcorn. Equally tenants' groups may be socially orientated - in this case there would be some recognition of a demand for collectively provided social activities or the belief that there was a desire to strengthen the community spirit of an area. Alternatively groups may be mobilised by tenant activists or tenant participation professionals to secure involvement in decision making structures in the housing authority. In each situation we need to distinguish between those set up

spontaneously by tenants or promoted by professionals in response to events which are perceived to demand immediate tenant/resident responses; and those which aim to secure a more general involvement against no single or particular group of issues. I would argue that those groups falling into the former category are often able to mobilize (and politicise) their constituencies more readily, and have the ability to secure a greater level of local involvement than those in the latter situation. This can be most clearly seen in the case of local authority tenants involved in the Liverpool Housing Action Trust and tenants in Runcorn, both discussed in Chapter Four. In cases such as this, the answer to the question 'why participate?' is much more easily explained. The ability to secure widespread participation and representativeness is important to the task of ensuring that groups are listened to by those in authority and to whom the tenants must gain access. Even so, participation is rarely a constantly evolving process, it is one which goes through cycles of activity and periods of latency. Not only does the difficulty in assessing levels of activity vary over time with the same group, but also spatially between different groups. The reasons why groups are more active than others is, of course, an interesting and complex question, but here the important point is that they are and the problems of assessing levels of participation are acute. It cannot simply be examined in relation to the numbers of groups that are in existence, or assessed in terms of the number of people attending

meetings - this too varies over time and space and in relation to the issues which need to be addressed locally. In MIH, the aim was to secure a *general* involvement of tenants in housing management, and, therefore, the question 'why participate?' is significant in relation to the level of tenant participation.

It is not surprising to find that the reasons why tenants get involved in tenant participation schemes, or in tenants' groups more generally, are many and various. There may be specific local factors which encourage a high level of involvement. In Runcorn, for example, a number of factors combined together to create an environment which resulted in a high level of tenant participation in housing management issues. I have discussed some of these factors in Chapter Four where it was noted that after the take-over the residents remained active in an attempt to make the housing associations (including MIH and LHT) more accountable to them, and to apply pressure to obtain a co-ordinated approach between to the respective landlords. In other areas local factors have had an effect on the level of tenant activity in local groups and participation arrangements, Peel Road Residents' and Community Association, the High Rise Group (and specific tenants' groups which make up the HRG) and others have been discussed earlier.

Tenant participation workers, or housing managers with specific responsibilities for encouraging tenant participation, in both major housing associations, appear to be important, at least in the early stages, for establishing tenant involvement. In MIH this has been the case, particularly on the Wirral and to a certain degree in Runcorn, where tenant involvement was most active during the fieldwork period. In the case of Peel Road and in the case of the Liverpool High Rise Group the existence of a local community worker and consultants respectively have been important influences promoting tenant involvement in management issues. Where local managers do not have specific responsibilities tenant participation is often not seriously encouraged. Managers sometimes lack interest in developing schemes or have too little time, as other issues are given a higher priority (often rent arrears are the major concern of such workers). Where this situation prevails it was quite common for tenants to be appointed to Resident Advisory Groups on an individual basis. In these cases the answer to the question 'why participate?' is often 'because I was asked to do so!'

In some of MIH's regions tenants were invited to become involved, although the structures have developed along more democratic lines as tenants have taken the initiative to organise a more representative system, usually with the support of workers in the organisation. This has been the case in the Wirral region. The Wirral

Tenants' Association (WTA) had been in existence for a number of years but was recognised as being unrepresentative of the tenancy in the various areas MIH has operations on the Wirral. From around 1990, through the initiative of a group of tenants (using leafleting campaigns, newsletters and satisfaction surveys) greater tenant interest and a broader based involvement in local tenants' groups was generated. WTA has developed a federated structure with eight tenants' groups affiliated to it and, at the time of the field research, was seeking to develop further in the Tranmere and New Brighton areas. In this sense the original structure could be understood as a necessary starting point. However, in other areas, and indeed, on the Central Tenants' Association, appointed tenants remained. This situation was recognised as being problematic on a number of grounds. The continued existence of appointed tenants promoted the impression that the organisation is not seriously 'encouraging tenant involvement in a number of ways' in all its regions. Indeed, from the point of view of MIH, its need for local information will not be achieved to the extent that it could be with a more representative structure. The idea of local knowledge needs to be treated with caution in these instances. Where tenants are elected by tenants' groups to represent their members on committees there is a greater possibility of two-way information flows between housing managers and tenants. At central level where appointed tenants are involved, they may be asked to consider

problems about which they have little knowledge, and to participate in making decisions affecting tenants who remain unrepresented.

MIH's Tenant Participation Officer has a responsibility for developing tenants' groups, supporting existing groups (at least in the early stages), and promoting and servicing tenant participation across the organisation. But it is clear that more work needs to be done at the local area level. This is especially the case because of MIH's devolved structure and the importance of local issues and neighbourhood concerns for tenants' and residents' groups. It is local managers who will be dealing on a day to day basis with tenant representatives and these who need to encourage tenant involvement as a result. I have discussed some of the ways that housing managers regard tenant participation earlier in the chapter. Here it may be added that there is a need for tenant participation to be viewed as an important part of their job description, and for their involvement to be seen as a priority in the organisation. Training for staff and commitment from senior officers is a prerequisite for such a development.

Ann Richardson (1983) outlined some of the arguments surrounding the question of tenant demand for involvement in participation arrangements. These may be summarised briefly as follows: People are seen as having an interest

in becoming involved in the formulation of policies which concern them. Here the educational benefits to individual participants of involvement are often articulated, or the desire to contribute to the formulation of policy itself is seen as likely to encourage people to participate. A second view, discussed by Richardson, sees little demand for participation in the process of policy making. The costs to participants, in time, commitment and financially, of course, are seen as prohibitive. The idea of a high level of participation in the early stages, which then subsides, is a variant of this view, according to Richardson. A middle ground can be found, in Richardson's view, when it is recognised that people will become involved if their individual circumstances allow; if people sense a need to effect change; and if they believe they have the ability to do so. Alternatively, if people are satisfied with the services they receive, or if they believe their efforts to change things will have no impact, or that changing the supplier of services would be simpler, there would be little (continued) demand for involvement.

They must feel that there are issues which need to be addressed, and forums where their contribution will be heard, in order to take the trouble to participate (Richardson, 1983: 68).

However, as I have indicated earlier in the chapter, the arenas for tenant participation in MIH are not the locales of decision-making in the association. Moreover, information about what has taken place at executive meetings are rarely made available as a matter of course to

tenants. The forums where staff and tenants do come together to discuss housing management, the RAGs and the TPF, are widely felt to be staff dominated and directed. In addition, when ad hoc groups have been established by MIH to review a particular policy, tenant involvement has been regarded as unsatisfactory by many tenants. For example, on the 21st of October 1991 MIH Directors established the Repairs Review Group to review the whole reactive, cyclical and planned maintenance systems. At a meeting of the TPF in November 1991 tenants put forward the view that they should be involved in the review. The Chair of the meeting (a member of the Committee of Management and a retired housing professional) responded that

he had the feeling that the Repairs Review Group dealt with technical and financial concerns.... and it was difficult enough to manage without having tenants on it.... it is only when the group has something specific to say to tenants that tenants need to get involved¹¹⁶.

A member of staff on the Repairs Review Group indicated that it was important to 'keep the group small' (6 members) but that they 'could cope' with an additional one on the group. The TPF agreed that a tenant¹¹⁷ sit on the review group. The tenant who put himself forward had a keen interest in repairs. Indeed, it is the case that maintenance is a key concern for most, if not all, tenants'

¹¹⁶ Field notes.

¹¹⁷ Tenant Participation workers argued that two tenants should be the minimum because of the need for tenants to gain confidence and support from each other in a context which is easily dominated by staff.

groups everywhere. Despite this, MIH's Chief Executive over-ruled the TPF decision, tenant involvement was deemed to be too cumbersome and less than useful because 'it would alter the nature of discussion and debate'¹¹⁸. Tenants were informed that they could set up a parallel group if they so wished. The issue of representation was one which re-emerged until the Review Group reported in February 1992. Tenants were very dissatisfied with their exclusion from the review (TPF Meeting 22.1.92) but the chair of the TPF indicated that he believed that 'as long as tenants have an input before a decision is taken that is alright as far as [he] can see'¹¹⁹.

The limited capacity for tenants to make their views heard is seen as part and parcel of the association's paternalistic treatment of its tenants, especially at central level, this is argued to have an important impact on tenant involvement. Tenants are encouraged to become involved initially, then they are not taken seriously, or are 'pushed aside' (TPF 22nd January 1992), or 'treated like children'¹²⁰. This results in a low level of participation in general, the important issue of 'why participate?' is not evident. Although in certain

¹¹⁸ Interview with the tenant put forward for the Repairs Review Group 4.12.91.

¹¹⁹ Field notes.

¹²⁰ Wirral Tenants interviewed 28th November 1991.

localities, where there are particular working practices or concerns evident, this pattern may not be reflected.

Liverpool Housing Trust's tenant participation scheme

Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT), the second largest housing association based in Liverpool, has a number of similarities to MIH. Like MIH, it has been in a process of expansion, but this has not been pursued uncritically. There has been a great deal of concern amongst senior staff and tenants about rapid growth and the (unintended) consequences of it¹²¹. Like MIH, LHT has established tenant participation over recent years in response to Housing Corporation directives and association identified needs. But, the organisation is seen, certainly by its more active tenants, as being committed to the ideal of tenant participation. Other differences are seen in relation to funding: LHT appears to have a clear commitment to tenant participation but appears to the observer not to resource tenant participation to the same extent as MIH. Tenants in MIH can expect to be funded to attend conferences (if nominated to represent the tenancy, or parts of it) and have expenses reimbursed when attending meetings. Certainly MIH gives the impression of spending much more on tenant participation than LHT, but also gives the impression of having less commitment to delegating real

¹²¹ Letter from the Chief Executive of LHT to the Chair of the Canning Area Residents' and Tenants' Association, 15th July, 1992.

decision-making to tenants than LHT. LHT had not, at the time of the fieldwork, worked out in detail the resource implications of tenant participation. Like MIH, LHT also owns and manages property in the Runcorn area where there is a high level of tenant involvement which I have discussed earlier and in a previous chapter.

Runcorn tenants occupying LHT property are involved in the hiring and firing of maintenance contractors and are involved at a number of levels in development decisions. Tenants in the Liverpool district, on the other hand, did not have the same level of control at the time of the field research. The two districts are resourced differently: LHT (and MIH) received a 'dowry' with the voluntary transfer of property¹²², which has been recognised as facilitating involvement in management and development decisions in Runcorn¹²³. But there are other factors which facilitate the higher level of participation in Runcorn. Because the properties in Runcorn are owned by four different housing associations, who own property in clearly identifiable areas, rather than having properties 'pepper-potted' around various localities, it is easier for tenants to organise and participation to be arranged. Moreover, because tenants organised themselves in the late 1980s over fears regarding the future of their tenancies (see Chapter

¹²² see Chapter Four.

¹²³ LHT Tenants' Conference 1991 held at the Moat House Hotel, Liverpool on 29th October.

Four) tenants are able to draw upon, and benefit from, their past experience.

Tenants in the Liverpool district often occupy older properties, especially in the southern part of the city and in Canning, which under the present funding arrangements are costly to improve¹²⁴. This means that the possibility of involving tenants in improvement plans is remote while the funding problems remain. Because LHT's properties are scattered around Liverpool, and are not readily identifiable as such, tenants here are faced with problems not encountered by Runcorn tenants when attempting to organise. Runcorn tenants are seen, by Liverpool tenants, as having advantages over Liverpool, especially regarding funding, and this is sometimes expressed in terms of an 'us' and 'them' scenario. Runcorn is seen as 'running' when it comes to participation but Liverpool tenants are simply regarded as 'walking'¹²⁵. Tenants in Liverpool often expressed an interest in moving tenant participation and involvement forward 'towards the situation which exists in Runcorn' or having tenant participation based upon 'the Runcorn model'. But the situation was more complicated than this implies. While tenants in Liverpool as a whole compared their experience with tenants in Runcorn, those in

¹²⁴ See Chapter Five for a more detailed discussion of the funding problems of property in Canning and its implications for community development.

¹²⁵ Noted during the LHT Tenants' Conference held on the 29th October, 1991.

the South Liverpool area of Canning tended to see their experience as tenants in different terms from both Liverpool as a whole and Runcorn. Abercromby and Riverside Tenants' Association's (ARTA¹²⁶) did distinguish themselves on some issues from their Liverpool counterparts, mainly because of concerns associated with the distinctive property type found in Canning (Georgian houses in multiple occupation): concern over gentrification and being priced out of the area (if economic regeneration was to be successful), and fear of crime (security) in Canning (which, in part, derives from the nature of property). Canning residents are also active in the tenant participation arrangements established by LHT.

I have indicated earlier that the form tenant participation takes will reflect the outcome of struggle between interests in the organisation. Work with ARTA (later CARTA) showed that there were some members of staff who saw their professionalism threatened by the introduction of mechanisms to involve tenants, but that there were many staff and committee members clearly committed to the idea of 'democratising the organisation'¹²⁷. Staff have indicated that the move to involve tenants *more fully* has come from the very top of the Trust's hierarchy and is being built into the very

¹²⁶ Later known as the Canning Area Residents' and Tenants' Association (CARTA).

¹²⁷ Interview 27th February, 1992.

ethos of the Trust¹²⁸. The housing manager interviewed on the 27th indicated that he had not always been committed to tenant participation but had changed his thinking radically. He argued that it was

the task of the organisation to show workers the benefits of tenant involvement in decision-making, the desirability of democratising the Trust and the importance of tenant participation (Interview 27th February 1992).

A number of tenants and staff in LHT acknowledged the influence of Margaret Simey¹²⁹ in the move to democratise the Trust. Mrs Simey has consistently argued for a 'political morality' in the Trust¹³⁰, accountability in other housing associations (NFHA Conference 1990), and other organisations and institutions (including Merseyside Police) over many years. Margaret Simey's influence is recognised as important for the way it has directed the Trust towards *engaging* with the issue of accountability and promoting tenant control. Active tenants certainly perceived this to be the case. At a Liverpool District Committee Meeting on the 11th of December 1991 a tenant summed up this impression when she commented that...

at first I thought it was a P. R. job,
but now I think they are really
genuine!

¹²⁸ Interview 27th February, 1992.

¹²⁹ Margaret Simey was referred to in Chapter Five in relation to her speech to CAAG's second AGM held on the 26th May, 1993.

¹³⁰ Policy Forum Meeting 13th January, 1992.

The long term aim for the Trust, at the time of the fieldwork, seemed to be to provide tenants with a high degree of input into decision-making. In the future tenants would make decisions, while staff in the Trust would carry out research into the relevant, legal, options necessary to carry out this task. A situation analogous to that operating, in an ideal sense, in local authorities, where elected members make decisions on the basis of research carried out by local authority employed officers.

At the time of the field research some executive decisions were already being made by tenants' groups in Liverpool. In the Canning Area, CARTA had been given the power to determine policy and commit funding on security measures for property in Canning, a major concern for tenants in this area. It is likely that tenants are able to make better decisions regarding measures to make tenants feel more secure, because of their experience. It also means that tenants hold *responsibility* for decisions taken if they prove to be mistakes. But, the tenants lobbied for the right to take this action and the organisation was responsive to the tenants' demands.

Whilst LHT's decision-making structures are perceived by LHT's active tenants to be open to tenant involvement, this does not mean that all tenants perceive this to be the case. In some areas groups have not easily been established (Granby for example). This may, at least in

part, be accounted for by the reasons put forward by Richardson (1983) and discussed earlier. But since there were no organised tenants' groups in LHT's property at the time of the fieldwork, in Granby, for example, the data is limited and no conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, because inner-areas like Granby do house people with limited housing choice in housing which is widely regarded as being undesirable (measured in terms of demand on the waiting list, usual waiting time for an offer etc) it can be suggested that residents there feel that changing their supplier of housing, or simply moving out of the area, serves their purposes better than becoming involved in tenant participation. Residents may believe their efforts are unlikely to effect change. It is, however, very unlikely that tenants in Granby (and other areas) are satisfied, more likely that they are resigned to their housing. These arguments are speculative but are issues which need to be addressed by associations operating in these areas. As in other areas individuals will vary according to their time, resources, and commitment that can be given to tenant participation. People's perceptions of a housing association may also be important for conditioning the willingness of people becoming involved. Participation is a highly contingent process.

Housing associations, like other landlords, have reputations which can influence the willingness of tenants to become involved. The situation may be more pronounced

for black residents living in the South Liverpool area of Granby. Housing allocation procedures operated by the City Council Housing Department have been found to be discriminatory by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and have been subject to a Non-Discrimination Notice (1989). The housing associations in the city were also obliged to follow the same discriminatory procedures as the council because of the nomination arrangements (Gifford et al, 1989). This experience of institutional racism could have had a significant impact upon the willingness of some black and ethnic minority tenants to become involved in participation schemes. It is also likely that in the areas where property is particularly run-down, where there is a recognised need for rehabilitation, people may well believe that they have little stake in their properties and therefore little reason to become involved.

Non-housing focused citizen participation in Liverpool

During the fieldwork period there were a number of participatory mechanisms established in inner-Liverpool, in and around the Canning area, which absorbed considerable research attention (see Chapter Five). One such arrangement was established in relation to the 'Project Rosemary', especially in relation to a proposal to build a new hospital on Upper Parliament Street. A brief description of the way participation took place will serve to demonstrate the importance of local peoples' perceptions

of their ability to make their views heard, to effect change, and indeed of the power relationships involved in some participation relationships in the contemporary context.

Project Rosemary is an area on the border of the postal districts of Liverpool 7 and 8 which has been designated by the Dean of Liverpool Cathedral for urban regeneration. It is boundaried by Upper Parliament Street, Grove Street, Oxford Street and Smithdown Lane. The site lies on the south eastern fringe of the city centre. Responding to a concern about derelict and redundant space, following clearance of the Falkner Estate, the Dean established Cathedral Estates Limited, after consulting the City Council and Merseyside Task Force to help develop the area, in March 1990. 'The community', together with the Task Forces and private investors were to work in partnership to create jobs, affordable housing, and meet 'other community needs'¹³¹. Discussions about the development were held between local authority departments and the respective central government agencies operating in the vicinity, and between the numerous community groups operating in the area and in neighbouring districts. However, it was felt by many working on the project that the existence of the many and various interest groups has meant that 'agreement is hard to come by'¹³².

¹³¹ Project Rosemary News Sheet December 1991.

¹³² Project Rosemary News Sheet December 1991.

Site One of the Project Rosemary site is, at the time of writing, being developed by Liverpool Health Authority. A new obstetrics and gynaecology hospital with NHS Trust status is nearing completion. The Health Authority engaged in a consultation process with the public in the area, distributed leaflets, and held public meetings, which were initially well attended. The community in the neighbouring areas were concerned about a number of issues associated with the development. Briefly these included concern over securing employment for local people during the construction of the hospital (and after), the reduction of jobs as a result of the closure of three Liverpool hospitals once the new hospital becomes operational, the reduction of bed-spaces as a result of the latter, traffic management problems, a concern about the number of derelict buildings in Canning (which neighbours the site) when the Women's hospital in Canning closes, and equal opportunities in employment both during and after construction.

Despite proclamations that the Health Authority was interested in resident views it became clear that the consultation meetings were intended to provide a one way information flow, from Health Authority to community, about decisions already made, and about the Authority's progress in implementing its proposals. No attempts were made to involve residents in the decision-making itself. But, because of the ambiguities contained in the concept of consultation, the Health Authority could claim that it was

involving the residents in a *participation/consultation* relationship. Perhaps the authority did not need information in order to make better decisions, but it certainly needed a level of consent since patient power and community consultation has become so important during the late 1980s and 1990s, in the Health Service and in other areas of welfare.

The main concerns articulated during the public meetings were about jobs, training, and equal opportunities, especially with regard to black people in the locality, in Liverpool 8, whose experience of discrimination and exclusion from the labour market is well documented. But it became increasingly clear that faith could not be placed with the Health Authority in this respect. Jobs in construction seemed a possibility, but these would be short term. The closure of the maternity hospital in Oxford Street, Mill Road Maternity Hospital and the Womens' Hospital which would accompany the opening of the new Trust hospital meant that the Health Authority could not make any commitments to the community regarding employment. At one public meeting to discuss the Authority's proposals it was argued by the Authority's spokespeople that 'we cannot make any promises, we are trying to be honest, but we hope to give people a fair chance [regarding employment]'¹³³.

¹³³ Public Meeting held at the Caribbean Centre, Upper Parliament Street on 28th October, 1991.

The neighbouring community became increasingly disillusioned with the consultation process offered by the Health Authority in relation to their proposals. Put bluntly, people felt that the consultation offered was a sham, that decisions were made about issues affecting their community, but the authority simply informed the community about decisions once taken. Attendance at meetings began to decline. Often meetings were composed mainly of those charged with a responsibility to provide information about activities in the area to their respective community and voluntary groups. An informant commented that..

they put a leaflet out saying something along the lines of 'come and hear what we are up to'... I thought, what is the point? They don't want real consultation. They don't want to hear about what we have to say... (Interview 15th July, 1992).

In sum, the community which neighboured the Project Rosemary site found it difficult to have their views heard, and a very limited ability to effect change. Residents heard few assurances regarding their main concerns about local jobs, traffic management and derelict buildings. Although pressure on contractors has had limited success. At best those attending meetings only had an indirect involvement (Richardson, 1983) in decision-making. Consultation reaped few benefits. But for the Health Authority, consultation provided a forum to convey information to the local community and, through this forum, the authority could claim a level of legitimacy.

In the previous chapter I expanded a discussion of the participatory mechanisms which CAAG experienced in relation to Planning. It is worth reiterating some of the main points here. In particular it was noted that the officers of the City Council's Planning Department played an important role in laying the foundation for CAAG's formation at the end of 1991 in order to obtain a response from the community to the Government's City Challenge regeneration proposals. It will be remembered that Department of Environment regulations required community consultation (see also Atkinson and Moon, 1994) in order that Liverpool's bid could be made. Other reasons may have informed the Planners' model of consultation: progressive professionalism, past mistakes, past experience and some statutory requirements. But it is also important to note that members of the community were, in a number of respects, dissatisfied with the consultation they experienced. As in the case of the Health Authority, CAAG found that policy decisions, in their case housing policy, had been decided without prior consultation. It was noted that despite the idea of partnership the nature of projects were broadly defined by the Planning Department and City Challenge and concern was increasingly being expressed on the CAAG executive, not least from the community worker¹³⁴, that some of the aims and priorities outlined in the early public meetings, and incorporated into the Strategy for

¹³⁴ Progress Report Canning Community Worker February, 1993.

Canning document produced by the City Council, in consultation, were not being addressed.

CAAG members believed that they were being listened to, initially, and welcomed the opportunity to define policies and to commit funding. CAAG could (and did) provide support for the Planners' 'vision'. It was a convenient alliance but a necessary one since many of the proposals outlined in the Strategy required public funds, and extensive lobbying would be needed to secure those resources. As time passed it was felt that consultation was on the Planner's terms, reflected in agenda setting and in the tight-timescales set for CAAG to respond to proposals. It is also worth remembering in this context that consultation with the Planning Department had problems for CAAG and its relationship with the community. Tight deadlines meant that consultation with the wider community was more limited than it might have been otherwise.

Whilst CAAG's relationship with the Planners and City Challenge were important, CAAG also had relationships with a number of other organisations operating in the Canning area. In Chapter Five I demonstrated the importance of the mixed economy of housing in Canning, noting that housing associations owned 55% of the property there at the time of the research. Chapter Five also discussed how housing was a fundamentally important issue for residents in Canning, in particular it was linked, inextricably, to the issue of

community development. I noted also the range of organisations and agencies which were operating in Canning, but the relationships between CAAG and both the City Council and City Challenge were discussed in more detail. Here I want to suggest that CAAG's relationships with other agencies also served interests held by CAAG and the respective other parties (for a time at least). The benefits that the various agencies gleaned from their relationships with CAAG illustrate the potential of participation relationships; they render manifest the levers available to community groups.

CAAG had links with Sir John Moores (now deceased) who provided CAAG with funding in its early stages through the John Moores (Littlewoods) Foundation. John Moores was regarded as a 'friend' in City Challenge, although CAAG's links with the private sector was limited on the whole. CAAG maintained links with other community organisations operating in the voluntary sector in a number of ways: through City Challenge Sub-Group meetings, which were attended by other voluntary and community sector organisations and where information could be shared, for example. Furthermore, a characteristic of community activism in Merseyside (and perhaps elsewhere) is the practice of simultaneous membership of a number of organisations. Links are also built and maintained by those employed to build community networks, such as the community worker, for example. CAAG also has utilized the

services of Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service who has assisted their establishment as a constitutional body and has provided funding assistance. This agency can also provide a mechanism for liaison with other voluntary and community organisations.

Data was insufficient to assess the nature of the relationship between John Moores and CAAG, but was sufficient to suggest that other organisations operating in and around Canning benefitted from a relationship with the main community organisation there, or at least saw benefit in strengthening links with CAAG. For example, CAAG members were amused when it was reported that the Philharmonic Hall (the home of classical music concerts in Liverpool) made a bid for funding to City Challenge, arguing that it was a 'community resource'¹³⁵. St. Brides Church on Catherine Street was keen for CAAG to use space on their premises for CAAG's office, it seemed that they also wanted to be seen as a community facility, but CAAG wanted to resist being seen as aligned to a denomination or particular religion¹³⁶, CAAG wanted 'neutral ground'¹³⁷, although CAAG did use St. Brides Church Hall for public meetings on a fairly regular basis during the fieldwork period.

¹³⁵ CAAG meeting 27th January, 1992.

¹³⁶ Minutes 29th May, 1992.

¹³⁷ Minutes 15th July, 1992.

CAAG, LHT and, in particular, LHT's *Older Properties Project*¹³⁸, had interests which coincided regarding housing policy. The key worker involved in the Older Properties Project was involved in putting together bids to improve 66 flats contained in 21 houses on Upper Parliament Street and Catherine Street. The aim was to reduce the densities, provide for family housing, improve security, reduce turnover, and provide parking and defensible space. It is probable that the bid for the capital funding to improve the properties was assisted by CAAG's, and CARTA's, clear support for this project.

Other groups desired a greater involvement with CAAG but were less successful than LHT. Merseyside Police's Community Liaison Officer for the Canning area had attended public meetings called by CAAG. In April 1992 this officer met with two of the CAAG executive members and requested that the officer be allowed to attend an executive meeting, be given details of the names of people on the executive, and minutes of CAAG meetings¹³⁹. The committee debated the desirability of having the Police Community Liaison Officer attend CAAG meetings, raised questions concerning the reasons for the request and, indeed, the purpose and usefulness of such involvement. As in other inner-city

¹³⁸ A project which aimed to identify strategies for dealing with the problems of funding the rehabilitation of the oldest properties owned by LHT, a number of which were located in Canning.

¹³⁹ Minutes 24th April, 1992.

areas, people are critical of policing in Canning, largely because of the disparity between police and community priorities (outlined briefly in the previous chapter), and are suspicious when it comes to the police desiring community liaison. The conclusion of the debate was that (because policing is an issue in the area) the community officer would be invited to a future meeting, the officer will receive minutes of the meeting the officer actually attends, and the officer should not be circulated with the names of the executive members.

In this, and the previous, chapter I have shown that community and tenants' groups have, in some cases, benefitted from their participation in housing management and urban policy development issues. But the relationship to an ability to generate funding, or control resources, is an important, limiting concern. Community and tenants' groups are in a dependency relationship in this respect and have few levers at their disposal when bargaining with dominant authorities. They have limited sanctions available. But dominant authorities need information and/or consent and this may be able to be exploited. The rhetoric of accountability and consumer sovereignty provides a lever for community and tenants' groups. The experience of lobbying can build on groups' skills to use the available sanctions¹⁴⁰. Nevertheless, the potential to influence urban policy may be limited by two further

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter Four.

factors. (1) the nature of the arrangements (2) the location of decision-making.

1. The nature of the arrangements vary between organisations and over time and space, but reflect the fact that power is vested unequally between parties in the participation relationship. Some parties, therefore, are more able to negotiate outcomes in line with their own interests and keep issues off the agenda. The City Challenge Executive was effectively able to keep housing policy off the agenda in Canning, and the maintenance policy remained in the domain of professionals in MIH. Arrangements vary because they are the outcome of struggle between competing interests. In some cases there has been a demand for greater involvement and more consultation (eg in relation to CAAG and Planning issues), but some types of arrangement only facilitate consultation not participation in decision-making. Participation arrangements can:

- a) provide only a limited capacity to influence outcomes;
- b) provide only a limited forum for addressing participant concerns;
- c) be away from the vicinity of decision-making;
- d) limit the actions of participant groups by making actions which are outside the participation structures seem unreasonable;
- e) serve as a channel for educating participants in relation to the constraints (imposed by government policy, funding or law for example) upon the ability of the

dominant authority to effect change in the desired direction.

2. *The location of decision-making.* Arrangements operating in Merseyside, and in inner-Liverpool in particular, indicated

- a) the fragmented nature of urban policy making;
- b) the marginalisation of the local authority;
- c) increased central government regulation (including the Housing Corporation) of urban policy-making and its impact on resident participation. Indeed, observation work provided support for Atkinson and Moon's (1994) point that the City Challenge initiative launched in May 1991 promoted centralisation in two ways: Firstly, it led to greater central government control over what the urban programme authorities spent their resources on. Secondly, by focusing the co-ordinating activities of City Action Teams and Task Forces on the City Challenge Areas the element of central control over how these programmes were carried out was extended (Atkinson and Moon, 1994: 95). Each of these factors can determine the capacity that community and tenants' groups have to influence urban/housing policy, and can illustrate something of the nature of power and politics in the locality.

Stoker and Wilson (1991) in their article *The Lost World of British Local Pressure Groups* note that there are very few studies of local pressure group activity (which

tenants' or community groups may be said to be a part). Whilst there was some interest in studies of this kind in the 1970s, that interest has not kept pace with the changes which have been occurring in local politics. It is envisaged that this study in Merseyside goes some way towards addressing this research gap. But there is a need for further research as these authors suggest. Indeed, some of the issues raised during the 1970s remain relevant and should be addressed as part of a future research agenda. Issues like access, inequalities, and the scope for participation, for example, persist as pertinent issues. But the changes taking place in the local political arena, not least the rise of un-elected bodies at the city level (see Chapter Four), and the increasingly mixed economy of service provision, mean that we must see the local authority less as the manipulator and controller of the local environment (Stoker and Wilson, 1991). The consequences of the consumer orientation in service provision, in the context of an enabling local authority, for local community and tenants' groups deserves more widespread study. The data from Liverpool, with its more established mixed economy of housing may well provide important hypotheses for studies elsewhere, in localities where the development of voluntary provision is a more recent phenomenon.

Stoker and Wilson note that some authors have drawn attention to the possibilities of an increased role for

business in policy making at the local level, for example in Training and Enterprise Councils, City Technology Colleges, in Urban Development Corporations, and in Grant Maintained Schools. But they also suggest that there is a danger of pushing the argument about business influence too far. Business leaders, it is argued, lack the time, the commitment and often the authority to become effective local leaders. But, these authors suggest, there is a need for more research in this area.

In their brief look at the influence of non-business groups in their paper, Stoker and Wilson suggest a number of strategies that may be adopted by local authorities in relation to groups operating in a locality. But they recognise that 'the pressure group world is likely to be much more complex, unsettling and demanding than in the past' (Stoker and Wilson, 1991: 32). This is mainly because local authorities have created a network of voluntary and community groups which cannot easily be dismantled - they have and will develop dynamics of their own. These authors note also that complex alliances and networks may by-pass the local authority. This research has provided some ideas regarding the development of some such alliances, but again there is considerable scope for further research in this area. Stoker and Wilson note that the local authority is increasingly dependent upon the voluntary sector to implement programmes. This research has shown that this is certainly the case in housing and

that this has a tremendous impact upon participation politics and has largely gone un-recognised¹⁴¹. I have attempted to examine, through comparison, the nature of participation relationships in the voluntary sector, there is a need for further research in other areas of service provision as well as in housing policy-making and urban planning. Future research should also focus on other aspects of the participation relationship, such as in relation to the way service providers are also increasingly dependent upon community groups, or other user-groups, either for information or consent, or both, and its impact upon policy outcomes. This research has shown Stoker and Wilson's argument that 'local authorities are unlikely to be able to exercise the dominant and controlling role of the past' (Stoker and Wilson, 1991: 32) to be true, and has shown the need for an examination of the agencies which are usurping the role of the local authority and of their relationships with the 'world of local pressure groups'. It has also drawn attention to the considerable difficulty associated with evaluating participation arrangements. Further conclusions from the research are discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁴¹ For example, in Gyford's book *Citizens, Consumers and Councils* (1991) both the voluntary sector of service provision and participation are discussed but are not discussed in relation to each other.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions and Reflections

In Chapter Two *Housing Classes and Housing Action Groups: A Review of Two Theories* I examined the main debates which have surrounded Rex and Moore's (1967) housing class thesis, and Peter Saunders' property class model. I expanded the debate into a discussion of Saunders' consumption sector divisions approach since the significance of tenure is retained there. It was noted that Rex's theory (1967) ushered in a debate which would last for a quarter of a century. The main points of the model originally were that housing could be obtained in a number of ways: (1) Through access to a mortgage or other capital and owner-occupation. (2) Eligibility for council housing. (3) The private rented sector. Rex argued that different groups have different abilities to command access to desired housing and that those with a common-market position in relation to the means of housing could be called housing classes, drawing on Weber's idea of class which saw those with a common market position in relation to a range of markets (not just the labour market) could be called classes. At the time of slum clearance in Birmingham, at the time of writing (1965), Rex suggested a number of housing classes, graded according to what was considered to be the most desirable housing: with owner-occupation at the top and a room in a lodging house at the bottom. He said that there was an aspiration to move

upwards through the housing classes, and to move outwards from the city centre to the outer, suburban zones. Position in this schema was very important for determining life chances. Where desired housing is scarce there is a class struggle over the use of housing. Housing classes are a potential basis of conflict, but class conscious groups may not occur.

In Chapter Two I engaged with the debate over the idea of housing classes, discussing the main points of criticism, and, where appropriate, Rex's response to his critics over the past 20 or so years. I noted that early critiques were often directed at the method and approach brought to the Sparkbrook study by its authors, by those who considered their approach too structural. I also noted that the idea that a unitary value system exists in the city was effectively abandoned by Rex in 1971, and while this can no longer be seen as the basis for conflict we were left with the question: what is the basis from which conflict arises where it emerges in relation to housing action groups? Chapter Two also detailed how the Weberian concept of class in the model has been rendered problematic. Economic returns (either through the disposal or use of goods in the market) must be accepted as important to a Weberian understanding of class (Haddon, 1970). The review showed that questions remained over the relationship between the housing market and the labour market, the determinants of housing class situation. I

also drew attention to those critiques which had questioned Rex's ideas concerning the way classes, or conflict groups, relate to each other and the nature of exploitation involved (Bell, 1977). Whilst some agreement was found with Rex's response (Rex, 1977), that the relationships between classes are far more complicated than his critics have suggested, these complications remained unresolved. It was noted that some authors have preferred other ways of understanding housing action groups, housing status groups in Payne and Payne's work, interest group (Ward, 1975; Lambert and Filkin, 1971a) and status group in Bell's (1977) critique, but in most cases these authors have accepted the need for greater empirical work to discover the nature, range and role of these groups in urban politics.

In the review of Saunders' work I showed how his model tried to get over some of the problems identified in relation to Rex's work. It was noted how, in Saunders' view, housing can be a source of wealth accumulation (through tax benefits, rising house values and capital gains), and, because *economic returns* can be derived from certain positions in the domestic property market (owner-occupation), home owners can be called a class in Weberian terms. Other classes included: a dominant class, suppliers of housing (private capital) for profit; and the propertyless, tenants, whose interests lie in low rents and an expanded rented stock (Saunders, 1978; 1983). Saunders

argued that his theory had important implications for political action as divisions (between propertied and propertyless) fragment housing consumers: owner-occupiers and tenants. These divisions, it was argued, are not ideological, rather they are based upon real material interests.

The review of Saunders' property class/consumption divisions approach showed that, like Rex's formulation, there were difficulties associated with discovering just how many classes and sub-divisions ought to be distinguished and with addressing intra-class conflict (Thorns, 1981). Attention was drawn to work which questioned the importance of housing as an investment, and problems were raised in the form of the importance of the non-economic aspects of housing in the actions undertaken by home owners (Gray, 1982). These questions were considered critical for they had a bearing on the possibility for alliances between owners and tenants, alliances which are considered increasingly unlikely in Saunders' thesis.

Saunders himself had drawn attention to a number of problems with his property class model. He noted that it was based upon specific historical conditions: owner-occupation may not always offer the potential for wealth accumulation. The relationship between property classes and the overall class structure was viewed as being

particularly problematic. Indeed, it was this problem which led Saunders to reject the model in favour of his consumption divisions approach, but the importance of tenure in this later approach is retained. In Chapter Two I noted how the consumption divisions model (in similarity to Rex's housing class) had been criticised for failing to discuss the way consumption and production sectors interact. The consumption divisions model was seen as being dependent upon a simplistic dichotomy which sees owner-occupation on one hand, and council housing on the other, where the first is seen as always preferable to the latter, and where other forms of provision, such as voluntary modes, go unexplored.

In relation to both models, Barlow and Duncan's (1988) paper was regarded as important because it challenged the importance of tenure and the way tenure was conceptualised. In Barlow and Duncan's view tenure was exaggerated in importance in both theories; conflict is directed as much against providers as other housing consumers; what may be considered tenure related influences are often bound up with the wider class and status relationships in existence in particular localities at specific times (Barlow and Duncan, 1988). Providers were inadequately theorised in both models and it was felt necessary to include suppliers or providers in an analysis seeking to explain housing action groups and their conflicts at the local level.

In Chapter Four *Struggles Over Occupancy and Ownership - Successful Community Actions* support was found for Duncan and Barlow's (1988) critique of housing class. This chapter examined the mechanisms which promote the recognition of common interests arising from tenure and locality, the factors which contribute to the processes of housing action group mobilisation and the contingent factors which can inhibit these. Indeed the characteristics of mobilisation and action were given particular attention in this chapter. Lowe's (1986) work in Sheffield offered useful insights into the mobilisation process. However, it was considered necessary to reconsider the elements of his analysis which over-emphasised the role of local government in urban policy making, and underestimated the range of (often competing) ideologies operating at the local level. Both were considered important for the mobilisation of housing and community groups in this study. I illustrated how action undertaken by housing action groups arises from the relations of occupancy and ownership (Duncan and Barlow, 1988) and, in particular, over threats to security of tenure, with reference to empirical work in Liverpool and Runcorn. This work demonstrated the significance of including providers or suppliers in the analysis. Indeed, it demonstrated that the idea of suppliers needs to be much wider than the narrow conceptualisation found in Saunders' work which over emphasises the private sector. Chapter Four found material interests to be important in the

actions in Runcorn and in response the proposed Liverpool HAT, but ideas of locality, use-value and community also held significance in these struggles. The Runcorn study allowed alliances to be recognised across traditional tenure lines (Ball, 1983), and provided a basis for challenging Saunders' emphasis on the increasing fragmentation of housing consumers at the political level. This was examined further in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five, *Multi-tenure Community Actions: Struggles for Locality and Use-values*, focused on the examination of community groups where the constituency and activists are drawn from two or more dominant tenure types (inter-tenure or multi-tenure action groups). It was envisaged that through such an examination the significance of tenure (divisions) in community action could be established. The empirical work discussed in Chapter Five showed *alliances* amongst housing consumers, across number of tenures in Peel Road, Bootle. The concerns of residents in Bootle were shown to be associated with pollution and 'quality of life', issues which went beyond tenurial or material interests. It is notable that the Peel Road residents saw the Dock companies and authorities as their main opponents, and that the nature of the social base (a homogenous, stable, working class community) was seen to be of significance in their mobilisation. Chapter Five illustrated that the ideal of 'community' and the idea of defending the community were seen to be important from the

multi-tenure action group data. These concepts, it was argued, allowed a number of (what the housing class theories would suggest are) potentially conflicting groups to unite. But, in the Canning case study, even housing policy issues did not give rise to conflict between tenure defined groups. The Canning case study showed the importance of recognising an area's use-value (against the idea of the area being used for its investment or exchange value) and the importance of ideas of community and community development in an area with a diverse social base along class, ethnic, as well as tenure lines. In Chapter Five I discussed the relationships between the Canning area's community organisation (CAAG) and the City's dominant authorities operating in the Canning (Liverpool) area. I showed how these relationships, and CAAG's historical experience, had an important effect upon CAAG's mobilisation and bargaining strategy.

The nature of the relationships between residents' and tenants' groups and landlords and other dominant authorities formed the focus of Chapter Six *Power in the Locality: The Relationships Between Dominant Authorities and Residents' Groups*. The chapter focused on relationships between landlord and tenants in the voluntary housing sector, a sector which received little (or no) attention in the housing class/property class models, but other non-housing focused participation arrangements, mainly in Liverpool, were also included in the discussion.

In this chapter I argued that landlord/supplier and tenant relationships are often organised through participation relationships in the contemporary period, that these are complex and dynamic relationships, from which outcomes cannot be predicted, however, they are not equal relationships. The potential for newcomers groups to have an impact upon housing management or urban policy was found to be influenced by the nature of the participation arrangements and the location of decision-making both within the relevant institution and, in some cases, beyond that agency. The chapter showed that there are sanctions available to both landlords and tenants (to a greater or lesser degree) but the relationships cannot be seen to be based upon an idea of exploitation as in Marxist sociology. The chapter sought to show how these relationships illustrate something of the nature of power at the local level, the management of conflict in the city, and the need for further research in this area.

Barlow and Duncan's (1988) critique showed that even the limited concept of housing 'class-in-itself' is problematic when used in the same way as Lambert and Weir (1975), for example. They argued that it is possible to view housing classes

not so much as action groups but as categories on the basis of which, through shared interests and a common collective consciousness, social action may be initiated and conflict with

other groups occur (Lambert and Weir, 1975: 32)¹⁴².

Furthermore, empirical work has shown that there was no evidence of housing class consciousness of the kind likely to be expected from a reading of Rex and Saunders, because of the difficulty embodied in seeing conflict groups based simply upon tenure. In view of this, and given the already established criticism of the idea of class (discussed in Chapter Two) in the model, I would now argue for the abandonment of the housing class concept.

If the idea of housing class has only a limited value in theorising housing action groups and their activities, how do we understand them? There are, to an unknown extent, many residents' groups, tenants' groups... 'all those myriads of voluntary organisations that are based on locality, neighbourhood and tenure category' (as Bell witnessed in 1977: 38) which need to be recognised, theorised and understood as part of the political life of the city. Housing and community action groups should not be dismissed as: having narrowly defined status struggles; involving groups who are benefiting from those who have not or cannot mobilise; short term and populist with little long term staying power (Bell, 1977: 38), since these are empirical questions.

¹⁴² See Chapter Two, part one.

One way of conceptualising such groups would simply be through seeing them as part of 'the local world of pressure groups' (Stoker and Wilson, 1991: 20) referred to in the previous chapter. Alternatively, the Weberian concept of party may allow the links to be retained with a Weberian analysis. Parties, in the Weberian sense, can take a number of forms, they need not be the party political variety that we are familiar with in modern Britain. They need not be long term organisations, although they must have goals. Weber argued that parties may pursue wide ranging objectives, and their methods of achieving these may be similarly various. Although Weber did point out that the means used will depend upon the kind of social action they are seeking to influence, and may rest on the kind of stratification system in existence in a community: whether it is stratified by class or status. According to Weber, the main factor which determines the formation of parties is the 'structure of domination' (Weber, 1968: 939). The Weberian concept of party, like that of local pressure group, is able to locate the structure of power in a locality at the heart of the analysis, it is also able to encompass organisations which derive from class or status interests.

Indeed, Saunders argued that, should conditions change to remove the accumulative potential of home ownership so that the Weberian concept of property classes is no longer sufficient, the concept of party may aid a revised analysis

(Saunders, 1983). Although Saunders seemed to reject this view in *A Nation of Home Owners* on the grounds that the interests of home owners, whilst being very significant on a latent level, are rarely manifest to the extent that they can warrant being described a party. In particular

there is no specific home owner party, nor are owners or tenants organised on a permanent basis to pressure or lobby national legislators and civil servants (Saunders, 1990: 332).

However, Saunders seems to be misinterpreting Weber in several important ways here.

It may also be noted that it would be very difficult for housing action groups at the local level to label themselves a political party, or argue that their interests are overtly political, in the way that Saunders suggested. Many housing based groups depend upon holding or obtaining charitable status for funding purposes. Raising sufficient funds is essential for effective action in the contemporary period. The disadvantages of not registering as a charity means that there can be problems obtaining funding - making it necessary to direct funding through another registered charity. To be seen as an overtly political organisation can mean that charity status is denied. A number of the community and tenants' groups I worked with would deny their political role for this reason. Although the Chair of one of the tenants' groups I worked with defined 'politics' as 'Who gets what, and why? What action people

take and why?'¹⁴³, making it very clear that the organisation represented was very much involved in urban politics. Fortunately the Charity Commission's definition of politics at the time of the research referred to 'trying to influence the legislature'. As such tenants' groups picketing the Town Hall would not be prevented from doing so as a result of the charity law.

In the previous chapter I drew attention to Stoker and Wilson's (1991) article in which they argue for a new research agenda into 'the lost [and changing] world of British local pressure groups' (Stoker and Wilson, 1991: 20). Their arguments find considerable support here. It is also worth reiterating, at this stage, an earlier point concerning the importance of developments in the voluntary sector around participation, policy formulation and service delivery in the modern city, which ought to be located more centrally in future research in this area. This present research may assist in the formulation of hypotheses for studies elsewhere, where the mixed economy of housing is not yet so pronounced.

As Stoker and Wilson (1991) noted (in Chapter Six), it remains important to look at *access, inequalities of resources, and the scope for participation in research in this area*. Findings from this present research support these points. It has also shown that there are

¹⁴³ Field notes.

considerable methodological problems associated with studying participation and indeed power relations at the local level¹⁴⁴. Nevertheless, research of this nature could offer useful insights for those involved in the formulation of social policies and tenant activists. The impact of participation on participants (Richardson, 1983) and on housing management outcomes (Clapham and Kintrea, 1994) deserve more research attention.

In chapter five I discussed a community group's perception of conflict between City Challenge and the City Council and the impact of that conflict upon the community group, and its relationship to members and constituents. This demonstrated the need to look at inter-agency relationships and their impact on community groups in future research (a 'community power' study for modern times).

In Chapter Four I sketched some of the strategies that were being used by tenants and residents in Runcorn and by the High Rise Group. A more detailed and wide ranging survey of strategies used by community groups, including the use of the local and national media (see Peel Road, discussed in Chapter Five), would inform our knowledge of the tactical responses community groups make to urban policy (Lowe, 1986).

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 3 and 6.

Chapter Five focused upon multi-tenure action groups in the context of evaluating the importance of housing class (divisions) in community action. It is likely that such groups will become more common as the change in the balance of tenure continues. The evidence from areas where multi-tenure organisation is more established can provide hypotheses which can be investigated elsewhere. Writers should not assume that 'residents' associations are almost universally based on a single or dominant tenure type, [or that] their strength resides in a shared awareness of common identity and lifestyle' (Payne and Payne, 1977: 156). For these are empirical questions which require investigation in the contemporary period. As Ball (1983) argued, analysis should not close off investigation into potential forms of alliance amongst housing consumer.

In Chapter Five a number of factors were argued to be important influences upon the mobilisation process, one such factor was homogeneity of social class. The research would have been strengthened by a more systematic approach to the class composition of an area and background of participants. The Peel Road actions discussed in Chapter Five illustrated the conflict between the economic interests of the Dock authorities/companies, and the community. But the nature of the relationship between production and consumption sectors has not formed an important part of work in this thesis. The relationships between production and consumption sectors remain

unresolved, but ought to form an important part of future research in this area.

In both Chapter Four and Chapter Five I have recognised the importance of Lowe's (1986) argument concerning the importance of the social history of an area, the historical experience of organisation, for mobilisation processes and strategies in that area. I have tried to piece together elements of those local histories from published sources as well as from the oral histories of people in those (or from those) localities¹⁴⁵, this deserves a much more rigorous investigation. If I was to carry out this research again this aspect would form a more prominent part of the work, but its significance was recognised at a stage too late for a more detailed inquiry.

This thesis has contributed to a theoretical debate which has remained prominent in urban sociology for twenty five years. Using new empirical work, it has clarified and evaluated a number of problems with both Rex's and Saunders' housing class models, especially those associated with the importance of tenure in defining conflict groups. The thesis, has, at the same time, attempted to contribute

¹⁴⁵ One of the tenants' groups in Canning, CARTA, was at the time of the research involved in setting up a group to study the local social history. This was, in part, associated with the community development aims of the tenants' group (and other residents' groups). The group wanted to draw out some of the 'hidden' history of Canning, and to show that a mix of social classes has always been a feature of the area, to show continuity and change.

to an understanding of urban conflict in the modern period. The empirical work contained in this thesis has demonstrated some of the variety of responses that community and housing groups make to housing and urban management; and through this, has contributed to important debates in urban politics, sociology and social policy.

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